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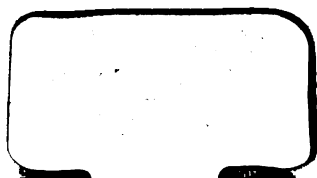
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AN OCEAN FREE-LANCE.

FROM A PRIVATEERSMAN'S LOG, 1812.

BY

W. CLARK RUSSELL,

AUTHOR OF 'THE WRECK OF THE GROSVENOR,' ETC.

'Oh, who can tell, save he whose heart hath tried,
And danced in triumph o'er the waters wide,
The exulting sense—the pulse's maddening play
That thrills the wanderer of that trackless way?
That, for itself can woo the approaching fight,
And turn what some deem danger to delight !'

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



LONDON :

RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,

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1881.

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AN OCEAN FREE-LANCE.

CHAPTER I.

THE SLAVER.

TURNED in again, wondering how long I should be permitted to rest this time, and mused over the events of the night, and Shelvocke's confession, and ghosts, and the dreadful sight of the corpse, until my brain simmered over my fancies, like a saucepan on a hob.

The main source of my bewilderment was that Shelvocke as well as poor little Peacock should have been visited by the same apparition. Peacock's seeing it I had attributed to

an hysterical and morbid nervous system ; but Shelvocke's evidence—the evidence of a matter-of-fact, healthy, sound-headed seaman like Shelvocke—proved that the spectral face that had risen upon Peacock was no cozenage of the lad's fancy ; and the poor fellow being killed a few hours after the vision had by its motions prophesied his death, was such a confirmation of the ghostly story as might have scared a man more sceptical than I in such matters.

I was really not clever enough, however, to argue the subject out. My reason went one way and my imagination the other. Certainly the hull of a privateer seemed an odd theatre for a ghost to act or 'threaten a tragedy on ; though if tradition spoke the truth, the *Tigress's* was not the only deck upon which a spirit had walked, to the dismay of fore-castle Jack.

I lay for a whole hour thinking over supernatural things : the Flying Dutchman, composants whose blue radiance had blasted the life out of men, and left them hanging over the yards like bolsters, drowned cats who had reappeared at midnight, and *mewed* up heavy

contrary gales ; until, cursing myself for an idiot, I shifted my position, screwed up my eyes, and forcing my mind upon pleasant thoughts, at last fell asleep.

I was aroused by the shrilling of the boatswain's pipe calling all hands, and immediately jumped up and went on deck, noticing that it wanted five minutes to four by the cabin clock, so that my watch below was very near over. The first person I encountered was Shelvocke, who was giving directions in his usual voice to some men engaged in trimming the after canvas. There was a light breeze blowing, and every stitch had been set, and there was a very pretty little murmur of running waters.

Guessing the meaning of this bustle, I stooped to look for the sail I had descried some hours before. Shelvocke saw me, and said, 'She is yonder,' pointing on the lee bow. 'See all clear, Mr. Madison,' said he. 'She looks to me to be a large brig, but I am not yet certain.'

His tone was perfectly collected. In a few minutes the hands were all grouped at quar-

ters, and I stationed myself aft with a glass to examine the stranger as we approached her. Shelvocke walked the weather side of the deck like a pendulum, sometimes coming over to my side and peering into the gloom ahead, and making some commonplace remarks about the weather, and speculating upon the character of the stranger. To judge from his present manner, no one would have credited that a short time ago he had appeared crushed and half-crazy with grief. Such an instance of self-control I should hardly have believed possible ; and this surprising exhibition of nerve and will deepened the amazement with which I reflected upon his belief in spirits, and his assurance that one had appeared to him.

The southerly wind that had sprung up was very gentle, and being on the quarter, the schooner's progress was slow ; and, when the dawn broke, making the horizon a line as black as ink against the ashen sky, the vessel was fully five miles distant.

As she stood hove up against the dawn, I never beheld a more clearly marked object.

She looked like a vessel cut out of black paper, and pasted on a grey ground, and had all the brilliantly-sharp minuteness you find on inverting a telescope and looking through the big end of it. She proved to be, as Shelvocke suspected, a large brig ; but of all puzzling sights, the spectacle she submitted, when viewed through the glass, was one of the most singular, at least to a sailor's eyes.

The dawn brightened so rapidly, and her outlines were so beautifully clear, that her remarkable appearance was at once apparent. Every yard upon her two masts was braced to a different angle : she had both top-sails set, each of them twisted contrary ways, as far as the bolt-ropes would let them go, through the canting of the yards ; her fore-sail hung in rags which, in the brightening light, resembled long icicles depending from the yard ; the outer jib (the halliards of which had been let go or carried away) was trailing overboard ; her spanker was split in halves, and the huge rent opened to every swing of the boom, and looked, with the light sky coming and going behind it, like an immense eye blinking.

Her hull was black and round-sided, somewhat low in the water, and her bows were graced with a long, projecting, finely-curved stem; and these signs, added to her short lower-masts, and the raking stay of her lofty spars, strongly disposed me to consider her a Yankee, and a fighting vessel too.

But, in the name of conscience, what doing in that trim?

‘Do you notice she is not sailing, sir?’ I exclaimed to Shelvocke. ‘Did any man ever see yards braced about as hers are! It must have taken her people a long time to achieve such perfection of disorder.’

‘Can you make out any signs of life aboard of her?’ said Shelvocke.

We both worked at her with our glasses. Presently I sung out:

‘Aren’t those men’s heads moving about near the wheel, sir?’

‘I believe they are,’ replied Shelvocke; ‘yes—I am certain now. Look all along her bulwarks, right away to the very eyes of her. Why, Mr. Madison, she’s full of men!’

We dropped our telescopes and stared at

each other. This was the first good view I had had of him by the daylight. His eyes had an extremely worn look, and his general appearance was that of a man who had been confined for some days to his bed by sickness. But there was nothing in his *manner* to indicate even a lurking grief or agitation. He was full of the strange brig now, and eyed me as if there was nothing else in the world to think of.

‘She has the look of a slaver, sir,’ sung out Chestree to us from the other side of the deck.

‘Thank you, Mr. Chestree; I believe your suspicion to be correct,’ answered Shelvocke, with a marked accent of kindness in his voice. ‘The crowds of heads along her side, Madison, can’t belong to her *crew*, or surely they would not suffer her to remain in that condition.’

I levelled the glass and looked again.

‘She has six ports on this side, sir,’ said I; ‘but only three of them are filled. Why, see! is not that a naked black man standing on the rail abaft the main rig-

ging, or does he merely *look* black against the sky ?

‘Naked he certainly is,’ exclaimed Shelvocke, steadying his telescope against a backstay ; ‘and for that same reason black no doubt. Why, surely she must be a filled slaver deserted by her crew.’

By this time the sun had risen, and a league away to the right of the brig the water was flashing back his blinding beams and catching here and there a flecking of pink from the gloriously-coloured sunrise ; the sparkling rays shone broad on the sails and hull of the brig ; and the crowds of negroes, whose heads swarmed above the straight black bulwarks, were distinctly visible to the naked eye.

‘Here’s a dead body. passing us, sir,’ suddenly shouted out one of the men stationed at the fore-castle gun, craning his neck as he gazed over the side.

I put down the glass and looked over into the water ; and sure enough, about a fathom’s distance abreast of the port cat-head there floated the corpse of a man on his breast, with the head immersed in the water and the

feet drooping, so as to make a semicircle of the body. He was dressed in a blue shirt and white duck trousers, the ends of which were crowded into a pair of high yellow-leather boots, and a long sheath-knife rested on his hip, suspended by a broad belt that clasped his waist. His hands being stretched right down under him in the green water, and his face hidden, it was impossible to tell his colour. He slid rapidly astern; but veering into our wake, the eddying of the water twisted the body in such a manner as to give one the impression that he was still struggling for life.

‘That should be one of the brig’s crew,’ said Shelvocke; ‘and it looks uncommonly as though the slaves had risen upon her people. If so, the job has been a recent one.’

This was evident enough from the proximity of the body to the vessel. But another five minutes placed the matter beyond all question. We had floated to within musket-range of the brig, and had rounded to, and there within speaking-distance lay this large

and powerful slaver, her sides crowded with black faces and naked figures, and looking as wobegone and helpless an object as the mind can well imagine, with her yards twisted in all directions, and her fore-sail in rags and her gear in the utmost confusion. She was, in one sense, hove to, if the slewing of her top-sails into corkscrews could be so considered; but in reality she was drifting, though softly enough, dead to leeward, as could be seen by the short, broad, oily wake that hung around her weather-side from stem to stern.

So far as I could judge, there were at least two hundred and fifty negroes, negresses, and piccaninies clustered along the bulwark of the brig, many of them exhibiting their full figures as they stood upon the rail holding on to the rigging. We were near enough to see the glittering of their eyes in the sunshine, and the flashing of their white teeth as they jabbered to one another and pointed at us, and, what was more ominous, the sparkling of the cutlasses with which a great number of them were armed. In spite of the wind

being the contrary way, we could distinctly hear the hum of their voices, and now and again the shouting of one man—exceedingly like the vociferation of some outdoor holy hullabalooist one hears preaching in England on Sundays—as though they had a chief or leader aboard, who kept up their courage by clamouring at them.

‘I suppose they don’t understand the use of gunpowder,’ said I, turning to Shelvocke, ‘or surely they would have given us a dose from their small arms or guns by this time.’

‘I think that may be taken for granted,’ he replied. ‘Forecastle, there! keep your bow-gun covering the brig ready to fire.’

‘Ay, ay, sir.’

‘Put your helm up—ease off your mainsheet—steady; keep at that, now.’

We ran down to within a biscuit’s throw of her, and rounded to again. The negroes imagined we meant to board them, for they brandished their cutlasses, and squealed, and yelled like pigs dragged along in sacks; the very children threatened us with their little black arms, and the thick line of black woolly

pates bubbled and popped like boiling pitch, while dozens of full-length black muscular figures, standing upon the rail or the lower ratlines, frantically motioned to us to keep off.

Their cries ceased when we put our helm down, but the same thick, guttural voice that had before sounded, rose once more, broken occasionally by a sort of deep acquiescent buzz, and there was a constant quiver of gleaming cutlasses.

‘I see no signs of a white or even a yellow face among them!’ exclaimed Shelvocke, looking considerably puzzled. He put his hand to the side of his mouth : ‘Brig ahoy!’

His voice produced the same effect that might have been expected from a cannon-shot ; volleys of the most extraordinary shouts and shrieks broke from the negroes, and the former scene of brandished cutlasses, waving arms and bobbing heads was repeated, this time with a little extra emphasis.

‘Can anybody speak English among you?’ sung out Shelvocke, when he could make his voice heard.

This second hail seemed to drive them mad outright ; what they imagined we meant by calling to them I have no idea ; but a broadside could not have thrown them into wilder antics. They hopped on and off the bulwarks with the agility of monkeys, slashing the air with their cutlasses, and menacing us with boarding-pikes, pulling one another off the rail in their eagerness to shake their fists or weapons at us, and making such an extravagant uproar that you might have supposed the noisiest denizens of one of their biggest forests were aboard of the brig.

‘Main-deck, there ! throw a shower of grape over her spars—but see that you don’t hurt any of the blacks.’

The muzzle of one of the carronades was elevated, and the piece discharged ; the iron hail swept through the main-topsail, filled the air with chips of canvas, and brought down a whole bucketful of blocks, and several rope’s ends. The effect of this explosion was comical ; the negroes who were standing on the bulwarks sprang head over heels back-

wards ; there was a universal ducking of black wool ; and above the rails not a sign of a human being could be seen, though through the open gun-ports we could spy the black bodies of some of the affrighted creatures as flat as turtles on their stomachs.

‘All this may be very funny,’ said Shelvocke, looking puzzled and bothered ; ‘but I wish I had not stumbled upon this adventure. Common humanity won’t suffer me to leave these miserable savages floating wherever the winds of heaven may waft them ; but our boarding them will cost us more blood than I intend that my men shall lose or shed. See ! nearly all the blacks are armed, and there can’t be less than a hundred and fifty males. They have evidently risen and murdered the crew, and I know what sort of spirit is put into slaves who have once tasted white men’s blood. They’ll fight like demons.’

He took another long squint at the brig.

‘Why,’ he continued, ‘we should have to massacre half of them before we could get the rest under. See the crowds of women

and children! It would be sheer brutal murder to fire into them. I cannot do it.'

'It looks rather like a quandary,' said I.

'A few wounds would make fiends of the unhappy wretches. You don't know what sort of foes kidnapped savages make after they have successfully risen upon their captors. Besides, the kidnappers themselves are destroyed, the vessel is no longer a slaver, and we have no excuse to attack her.'

All this was quite true, but what was to be done?

'It seems to me, sir, that either we must sweep her decks with grape, or carry her, or proceed on our course and leave her to her fate. I really don't see what other choice we have.'

'I have given you my reasons against firing into her,' he answered; 'and I am not at all disposed to decimate my men by an attempt to carry her. Leaving her to her fate is out of the question.'

Then, thought I, what *is* to be done?

'How came she with that ragged fore-sail?' I exclaimed, 'unless she were in yesterday's

gale?—if so, she must have been tolerably well handled, for all her spars are sound. Aha! Massa Neger's courage is beginning to rise again,' I added, observing a head like the top of a chimney-sweep's brush rise cautiously here and there along the line of the brig's bulwark. Presently the sides of the slaver pulsated with swarms of black pates. 'I don't know anything that is likely to bring them into our way of thinking but the want of water, captain.'

'Ay, but who's going to wait until their casks are empty?' he answered, combing down his beard in real perplexity. 'Madison, suppose you take a boat and see if you can make them understand you by signs.'

No sooner said than done. The second cutter was piped away, and I jumped into her, along with eight men.

Just as we shoved off, the wind puffed into a bright crisp breeze; the schooner bowed under it, and forged ahead by twice her own length before they could shake the wind out of her. It was always a difficult job to stop the *Tigress*, for I have known her to ratch with

nothing on her but her standing jib, with the sheet over to windward. To check her slipping tendency every inch of canvas was taken in, and she lay floating under bare poles.

Meanwhile the brig was slowly drifting to leeward like a collier in ballast. The moment the negroes saw the boat approaching them their consternation and passion were startling to watch. Their ceaseless and convulsive movements as they jumped on and rolled off the bulwarks, the perpetual motion of their dusky arms and legs, and the intricate writhings of their naked bodies as they pressed to the sides of the brig, reminded me of an ants' nest stirred up by a stick.

But the noise! the whooping, the yelping, the outpouring of the thick and throaty African accents, through two hundred and fifty pairs (as I reckoned) of blubber lips all at once—the short, strange, infuriate screams, like sheaves of a block revolving on rusty pins, of the women—and the shrieking of the children, might have made a man suppose he had lighted on a vessel full of demons fresh

from their Satanic port, and out on an excursion after fugitive mariners' souls.

That we might not be left in doubt as to the reception they intended should we attempt to board them, about thirty negroes, strong, tall, and broad-chested men, some of them stark naked, and others with cloths wrapped round their loins, sprang on to the bulwarks, every one of them armed with a boarding-pike which they held poised in their hands like spears, and from time to time essayed our distance by letting drive one of the pikes at us. Not only their agility but their strength was very unpleasantly illustrated by the space they made these heavy missiles cover. I doubt if there was a man aboard the *Tigress* who could have darted one of these boarding-pikes half the distance they were hurled by these limber, muscular, glistening negroes.

It was certainly a most disagreeably impressive scene: the row of stalwart, almost coal-black figures poising the long pikes, the whites of their eyes gleaming in their inky visages, and their ivory teeth shining as they yelled at us with their thick, purple lips

rounded into immense holes; the surging, palpitating surface of black heads stretching astern of the front guard of warriors; the vessel heeling over, and drifting fast to leeward; the rags of her foresail flogging the wind; and the ropes' ends, which had been severed by our grape, blowing away beyond the masts like serpents.

We hung on our oars, and I stood up in the stern-sheets of the boat.

'Mind that they haven't got a loaded musket among 'em, sir,' sung out the fellow who pulled bow: 'those niggers are more artful than monkeys.'

I had thought of that when I stood up, and considered what a capital target I made *should* some among them know how to pull a trigger. However, I had to take my chance, and so I began to gesticulate.

I made all the signs my imagination could invent. I pointed to the schooner, and laid my hand on my heart to express our friendship. I pointed to their masts, and then to the sky, and then at the sea, to signify that if a gale arose they would founder. I pointed

to my throat, and pretended to drink and eat, and pointed to their vessel and shook my head, as much as to say when their water and food were expended they must perish. I took a cutlass from one of the men, and imitated the action of breaking it across my knee, and then held it up, shaking my head again, to denote that we did not want to fight.

But it was no good. The more I gesticulated the more they roared and screamed. Every motion of my arms increased their rage, which grew so lively by the time I had come to the pantomime of breaking the cutlass, that not only were several boarding-pikes launched at us, but the band of negroes in the bulwarks were dragged down to make way for their infuriate comrades behind, and the women sprang and sprawled about as though executing some religious dance, tearing their wool, dashing their fists towards us, and flinging their very babies into the air in the paroxysms of their fury.

‘I wouldn’t mind making any man a bet,’ said the fellow who had cautioned me against exposing myself ‘that the poor devils think

us the crew of the slaver come back to take charge of 'em agin. I have sailed among kidnappers, sir,' said he, addressing me, 'and reckon I know something of the hignorance of niggers in a savage state. They can't tell one white man from another, and we'd have to cut 'em into bits afore they'd let us get possession of the brig.'

I had shaken my head, and sawed with my arms, and convulsed my body until I was bathed in perspiration and every bone in me ached; and it at last struck me rather forcibly that I might gesticulate my limbs off and nod my head overboard without producing the least impression upon these savages. So I stood staring at them, and wondering what was the next card to play, whilst they swarmed along the sides, some on all fours, many of them running to and fro—it was like a number of apes endeavouring to get at you through the bars of a cage.

'Hand me over that musket,' said I, wishing to try the effect of another explosion. I pointed the piece at them and kept it in that position, but they did not show the least alarm,

and I am persuaded that none of the poor creatures had any knowledge of the character of the weapon that was aimed at them. But the moment the musket was discharged (I fired over their heads), down the whole mass of them toppled as if they had all been shot dead. It would have taken months to drill a company of white men into such celerity and concurrence of action; the black crowd vanished like smoke before a sudden blast of wind, not a sound came from the vessel, and she appeared utterly deserted.

Hardly had the small white puff from the musket blown a dozen fathoms away, when, as though some distant mountain had echoed the report, the sharp crack of a small arm came down to us upon the wind; and looking towards the schooner, that had managed to drift half a mile away from us, I noticed a signal flying for our recall.

Before the men could ship their oars, a gun was fired.

‘That means urgency. Give way, men!’ I sung out; the oars groaned in the thole-pins, and the foam flew scattering past us.

What the matter was I could not guess, but as I watched the *Tigress* I could hear the piping of the boatswain's whistle, and sail was made with a rapidity that was strong evidence of danger being at hand.

We dashed alongside and sprang aboard ; the boat was hooked on and run up. Shelvocke stood to windward, and answered the inquiring look I gave him by pointing to the horizon on the weather-quarter, where I immediately beheld the canvas of what was apparently a large, full-rigged ship. I levelled the glass at her, and at once saw by the spread and hoist of her sails that she was a war-vessel ; but her hull was still below water, and it was impossible to form an opinion of her nationality.

‘I can make nothing of those negroes, sir,’ said I to Shelvocke. ‘Either they don’t or they won’t understand signs.’

‘So I judged : but what made you fire at them?’

‘I fired *over* them, sir. I wished to try the effect of another explosion ; thinking that as noise appeared to terrify them more

than anything else, we might manage to get at them by running the schooner close, letting fly a blank broadside, and pouring in upon them whilst they lay flat upon their bellies.'

'That might have answered,' said he : 'but let us see what yonder vessel is going to prove before we trouble our heads any further with those niggers.'

Every stitch of fore and aft canvas that the *Tigress* carried had been piled upon her, but her way was checked by her helm being kept down ; by this means we drifted sufficiently to leeward to maintain to some extent our position with regard to the slaver.

The negroes had regained their courage on finding that our boat had left their neighbourhood, and once more clustered along the sides of the brig, and I fancy by the character of their whooping, and the extraordinary postures into which they flung themselves, that they were not only defying us, but exulting over their imaginary victory. Of all striking objects nothing that ever I saw exceeded that brig as she lay, slightly heeling

away from us, with the dark green water lapping and creaming against her black hull, the upper line of which was alive with the crawling, leaping, motioning, and dancing figures of her sable freight, whose black skins were startlingly relieved by the constant glittering of the cutlasses in their hands.

However, I had not just now much leisure to admire effects of this description ; my attention was quickly absorbed by the vessel to windward, who, as she drew up out of the water with a rapidity that betokened nimble heels, disclosed the broad, long, and solid hull of a large frigate or sloop-of-war, with short but tremendously broad courses, and unusually tall topsails. She was swirling down upon us under a heavy press of canvas, with top-gallant, top-mast, and lower stud-ding-sails out, and her sails shone like cotton.

Shelvocke and I kept our glasses fixed upon her, and I was noticing the white line of hammocks along her side, and the beautiful set of her canvas, and her short royal mast-heads, and, indeed, beginning to view her

with serious misgiving—finding something new and unusual in the aspect of her—when Shelvocke dropped his glass, and exclaimed quickly, but in a collected voice :

‘Jonathan! I suspected him from the first. I am sure now. Mr. Tapping, get the American flag out, and hoist it at the peak.’

The stripes and stars were run up. We watched to see if he would answer. A couple of minutes elapsed, and then I saw a tiny black ball creep like a fly up to the main royal mast-head, until it was hard against the truck, when it broke into the bright and beautiful American flag.

‘I am right, Madison, you see,’ exclaimed Shelvocke.

‘Shall you fight her, sir?’

‘Fight her!’ he answered, laughing: ‘do you know that she may prove the *Constitution*, or the *Hornet*, or worse still, the *President*? one of those vessels I’ll swear she is; in which case she will be carrying over fifty guns and four hundred men. Fight her! what do you advise?’

‘Why, sir, after our action with the *Diane*——’

‘Ay, but that ship is not the *Diane*—cannot you see that?’ he interrupted, watching the approaching vessel all the time he was talking: ‘and worse luck still, she is a Yankee.’

A big ship she undoubtedly was, though, as she approached us stem on, I could only form my judgment of her size by the height of her masts, and the enormous spread of her canvas.

‘Now, I’ll make the slaver serve our turn,’ cried Shelvocke. ‘Helm there! keep her full!—let her go!’ he shouted.

The helm was starboarded, the canvas rounded, and with the muzzles of her lee guns trailing through the passing foam, the *Tigress* snored through the water. In spite of his flagatour peak, however, Jonathan instantly twigged us by this manœuvre. His studding-sails melted away from his weather yard-arms like summer clouds upon the blue sky; in a few moments he was braced up on the starboard tack, bowlines hauled out, main-

tack boarded, a whole flight of flat staysails between his masts ; and as he swept round in pursuit of us, with the water smoking over his forecastle as he met the first of the sea, and his long, low, heavy black hull sliding like a water-snake along the bed of glittering froth churned up by his shapely bows, he let fly three guns at us.

‘ That shows you his calibre ! ’ exclaimed Shelvocke, as the shot spurted up the water in three jets of foam within a few cables’ length of our quarter. ‘ Aim higher, old Doodle, next time, and look alive, or you’ll lose our scent. Now, little *Tigress*, show them your metal, sweetheart ! Mr. Tapping, haul down that flag, and exhibit English colours.’

Then after a pause : ‘ Are you ready ? ’

‘ All ready, sir.’

‘ Then hoist away ! ’ and as our own glorious bunting soared to the peak we slapped our two aftermost broadside long guns at the enemy.

‘ Now let us mind our eye ! ’ shouted Shelvocke, flushed with the excitement of the pursuit ; and sure enough, and as though our

guns had aggravated the insult of our flag beyond Jonathan's endurance, he put his helm down, and as he brought his broadside to bear, the long black hull flashed into a blinding blaze, as though the whole ship had blown up; a dense volume of white smoke hid him; the sea was lashed into a fury of foam at precisely the same distance from the schooner where the first shots had fallen, and at the same moment a dull *thud* trembled through our vessel, as though she had grounded an instant on a shoal.

'Hulled, by Jupiter!' said Shelvocke; 'confound him, what metal the villain carries!'

Heavy, indeed! and the worst of it was he was out of range of our guns, so that it would have been merely wasting powder to answer him.

'I hope that confounded slaver hasn't brought us into a mess!' thought I; and as I watched the towering canvas and black hull of the heavy ship tearing through the water and curling out a high green wave that broke into foam abreast of the foremast, and swept aft to form the long wake

that glittered like a silver ribbon upon the tremulous green seas astern of her, dismal fancies of American gaols, Yankee hectoring, and an abrupt wind-up of our roving holiday crowded my mind, and I thought that Shelvocke had shown want of judgment in suffering the Yankee to draw so close to us before he gave his schooner the reins.

Assuredly if the big enemy only managed to wing us, our game would be up ; against a big ship with twenty-four ports of a side—they could be counted now—her tops full of men, and her decks bristling with marines, the *Tigress* would be able to make but a very short stand indeed. Moreover, in Jonathan we had a smart sailor to cope with ; not a Frenchman who could not put his helm down without missing stays, but a shrewd, bold, and determined seaman, who not only knew what a ship can do, but had skill enough to make her do it.

This particular Jonathan was sailing his ship magnificently : intent on holding the weather-gauge, and yet never choking her ; making every shred of canvas do its work ;

marking the instant of his luff to fire at us, with an expertness that scarcely lost him a fathom of way. Indeed, I never remember a ship better sailed ; and when I saw how purely *British* was the science of her handling, and considered that her people were talking and speculating about us in our own language, that in all probability there were men bearing our own names aboard of her—Shelvockes, Madisons, Peacocks, and a host of Smiths and Browns, and Johnsons, as any man might warrant—and that our own blood circulated in their veins, it seemed difficult to conceive that she was a bitter enemy, chasing us merely and solely to capture or destroy us ; difficult, I say, until—pouff ! the glare of a broadside, and the lashing into foam of a small circumference of sea, dispelled these peaceful fancies, and made me wish these *relations* of ours at the devil.

She had started after us when she was about a league to windward on our quarter ; for some time she held her position, and there was a moment when my faith in the *Tigress* abandoned me. ‘ She has more

than her match yonder, both in weight and bottom,' I thought, and my heart felt as heavy as a deep-sea lead in my breast. Ay, it was galling to me to a degree beyond the power of any landsman's sympathy to compass, to imagine that our beautiful schooner—she to whose lovely lines and surpassing heels my faith was as purely committed as a lover's to the honour of his sweetheart—was going to be outsailed by a big, square-rigged man-of-war.

I glanced at Shelvocke. He was lighting a cigar, leaning against the bulwark with his back turned upon the Yankee, in the easy attitude of a yachtsman enjoying a pleasant cruise.

'Is she not fore-reaching on us, sir?' I exclaimed.

'Fore-reaching!' he replied, with a contemptuous laugh. 'Did you ever see an old woman make sail in chase of a bad boy?'

'I hardly remember. But if the old woman had *her* agility,' nodding towards the Yankee, 'I should not like to lay many dollars on the bad boy's chance.'

‘Ay, but it is not *all* heels, my friend. Where’s your staying power? The old woman may have the longer legs, but the boy has the lungs. But this is an illustration that will not serve my views so patly as the fellow’s paternity. If he be the true Doodle I reckon him, his thoughts are with the brig astern, and he draws a lengthening chain as he goes, the end of which will bring him up presently with a round turn. The imagination cannot figure the prodigious squint with which the commander of that ship surveys us—one eye on the *Tigress*, and t’other on the slaver.’

But the truth is, Shelvocke’s keen eyes had noticed what was not yet apparent to me, sharply as I watched: the schooner was drawing ahead of the American, slowly indeed, for the enemy was not only an exceedingly fast ship, but she had a direct advantage over us in having a long weather-gage that enabled her captain to keep her chokeful, and force us out of that close luff which would have thrown half her canvas aback had she attempted to imitate it.

About once a minute they let drive at us

with one of their long thirty-two pound guns, and it was the widening distances between the fall of these shots that at last unmistakably marked the superiority of our heels.

By this time the slaver was a mere dot upon the far horizon, and I had put down the glass after looking to see if the negroes had sense enough to take advantage of their being left alone, when Jonathan suddenly hauled up his mainsail, and let fly his head-sheets.

‘There he goes!’ shouted Shelvocke.

She rounded on her heel like a woman waltzing; and with a woman’s spite, too, she gave us her parting blessing in the shape of her whole broadside as she swept into the wind; the storm of iron fell a long way short. In another minute she was on the port tack, showing us a back view of herself—the most elegant part of her hull she could have submitted to people in our state of mind—and foaming through the water under royals and boarded tacks towards the distant and just visible slave-brig.

‘Luff you may, now!’ sung out Shelvocke, and the helmsman brought the schooner close

to the wind. 'A really lucky escape, Madison, and I give you my word I do not believe there is another vessel belonging to an English port that could have shaken off that fellow as we have.'

'I wish him joy of the brig, sir. Those niggers will avenge us.'

'Oh, he'll not treat them so fastidiously as we have. The nigger is only a man in the United States—not yet a brudder—and if Jonathan can secure a hundred of them by massacring a hundred and fifty, he'll reckon the bagging quite worth the cost of the powder. However, I am very happy that he should have taken so perplexing and unpleasant a job out of my hands.'

He jumped into one of the boats which swung at the davits, and examined the schooner's side. Only one shot had struck the vessel, about a foot below the aftermost broadside gun-port ; it had torn a thin strip of wood out, but the extent of the injury was limited to this very trifling defacement. The carpenter was sent for, and went to work to solder the wound ; and performed his business

so skilfully, that when, some time afterwards, I looked over the side, I could not detect the spot where the ball had hit us.

We had run the slaver out of sight, the hull of the Yankee was low upon the water, and distance was giving an exquisite daintiness to the colour and outline of her canvas ; the broad and speckless ocean, with the morning sunshine streaming gloriously upon it, lay stretched before us ; and last, and not least, it was half-past eight, and time for breakfast.

As I put my foot upon the companion-steps, I thought of poor young Peacock lying dead below. Alas ! how easily is the saddest memory deposed ! I had not given the poor dead boy a thought since I had been on deck.

Chestree and I took our seats at the table in silence, and in a few moments Shelvocke came out of his cabin. Depressed as I was by the sense of the proximity of the crushed and broken remains of a youth who, only a few short hours ago, was one of the fairest of God's creations, full of life and hope and the generous ambitions of manly boyhood, yet

such was the hang-jaw and yellow lugubriousness of Chestree's face, as he gazed fixedly with lustreless eyes at Shelvocke, that, after the first glance at him, I did not dare look again for fear of forgetting myself in a burst of laughter. I am sure the poor fellow felt Peacock's death acutely as being, however innocently, concerned in the cause of it ; but it was impossible that his distress could be half as acute as his dismal face expressed ; the most hollow-cheeked mute that ever wept on the way to the grave, and got drunk on the way home again, never excelled Chestree's countenance of mourning on this occasion.

However, he made shift to stow away a large breakfast, though he looked as if he must burst into tears every time he drew his fork out of his mouth.

I was almost pained by the severity of the grip Shelvocke had taken of himself. He could not keep his grief wholly out of his face, but whether it was that he was ashamed to have manifested so much emotion before me in the night, or that he was resolved to con-

quer his new trouble, and to clear out of his heart every memory of a painful and unhallowed romance, he talked pleasantly, and at times even gaily, laughed over our experience of the slaver and Jonathan's discomfiture, and as greatly astonished Chestree by his apparent light-heartedness as he had before astounded the poor man when he called him Peacock's murderer.

Yet in spite of his manner—and he certainly carried it admirably—I was sure, by the look of him, that it would have done him good to talk of his dead boy, and hear us bemoan him. Why any man should take the trouble to suppress or conceal emotions of which only a swab could feel ashamed, I do not understand. What sort of pride or conceit is that, I wonder, which makes a man fancy that dignity is best asserted by a wooden face? I admired Shelvocke's self-control as a piece of acting, but I did not think him the better man for doing well what any provincial tragedy actor for half a guinea would have undertaken to do better.

Before going to my berth to get some rest

during my watch below, I went on deck and had a look around me. The Yankee was out of sight astern, the wind had freshened into a glorious sailing breeze, and the brightest, gayest morning that had broken upon us since we quitted English waters was beaming over us. The heavens were full of steady-sailing clouds blowing, like puffs of steam, athwart us from the north-east ; and the schooner was sweeping magnificently along the sparkling blue surges, with her hull careened by the warm strong wind to an angle that scarcely varied to the extent of a degree, so constant and uniform was the pressure. I stood for some minutes admiring the sand-white decks and the groups of men at work on different jobs in various parts of the vessel, and the joyous scene of foaming waters, out of which from time to time there would leap a swarm of flying-fish sparking out from the dark green arch of a wave, and scattering as they flew like a handful of brand-new silver dollars flung broadcast into the water ; and then observing Chestree to be looking at me earnestly as though he meditated a conversa-

tion, I sidled to the companion, gained my berth, toppled into the bunk, and went to sleep.

I was awakened by Shelvocke, whose presence in my berth was so unusual that I stared to see him.

‘It is close upon eight bells,’ said he, ‘so I have not defrauded you of any rest. I wish you to oblige me. Peacock will be buried at noon : I have given directions for all hands to attend ; for as one of my officers—and on that account mainly—all honour must be done his remains. I have to ask you to read the service. I am capable of some self-control, as no doubt you have remarked ; but this is a tax which, if I know my strength, I ought not to impose on myself.’

His voice had slightly faltered when he mentioned the lad’s name, but he immediately mastered it.

‘I shall be happy to do what you wish, sir,’ I replied.

‘I have not shown myself on deck since breakfast-time,’ he continued, ‘expressly that my absence from this ceremony may be ex-

plained by you to the men as owing to my indisposition. I do not wish to set them wondering.'

I bowed. He seemed to have more to say, but a sudden rush of grief, that tossed his will aside as a current bursts through a barrier, darkened his face; he seized and pressed my hand, and went hastily to his own cabin.

The order had already gone forth, for when I reached the deck the boatswain's pipe mingled with the strokes of the 'bell eight,' and one by one the men, dressed as on Sundays, came out of the hatchway and formed themselves in lines on either side the gangway. After a few minutes the body, stitched in the hammock in which it had swung in life, with a twenty-four-pound shot lashed to the clews of it, was reverently handed through the companion, placed on a grating, and covered with the English ensign. Four of the boys of the ship's company then raised the grating, and stood with it at the gangway.

Although I do not claim more pathos for a funeral at sea than one ashore, yet one feature

there is at sea that makes a burial there more solemn than I have found it elsewhere ; and that is the crowd of silent seamen who are grouped around the body and behold the launching of their dead shipmate into the ocean, whose mightiness makes it a fit symbol of eternity. Otherwise, I do not think a funeral at sea more affecting than that ceremony ashore. You have certain elements of horror ashore which do not enter into our service : the churchyard weeds, crazy and crumbling old stones, a swarm of persons (such as the undertaker's men), who attend as a matter of business or curiosity, the ugly hearse, and, above all, the dark new grave, with its mound of freshly-turned soil alongside of it, amid which the attentive eye may often view the wriggling worm.

We are spared all this at sea : our grave is the eternal and boundless deep—our hearse is a grating or a board—our coffin the white hammock ; no hired mourners in rusty black and spirituous tears surround our poor remains—no parish-clerk dodges us into the very Valley of the Shadow of Death for fees ;

we are plunged into the heart of that ocean whose breast has often rocked us, the whole deep is our grave in perpetuity, and our heirs have nothing to pay for our spacious rights.

Short as had been young Peacock's association with the men, they had got to like him as a kindly-hearted boy who was always willing to do an obliging act, who was always blind to little harmless defects of duty ; and besides, they were drawn to him by his remarkable beauty. The feeling was that a kind, brave, and handsome young officer had met with a cruelly sudden and dreadful death ; that a familiar face was missing ; that it was a pity—a great pity ; and the quid stood out high in many a bronzed cheek, and there was a heap of rough and homely moralising at work in the eyes dwelling upon the outline marked by the full hammock on the graceful folds of bunting which covered the grating.

Yet how different the scene from the shore-going churchyard theatre of man's last performance in this world ! There was nothing here to make death dreadful. The sunshine

was bright in the hollows and foaming crests of the speeding surges ; the strong, glad wind swept through the rigging like a spirit-hand upon a harp, and the taut hemp rang out merry tunes ; now and again a flake of foam would sweep like a handful of snow over the forecastle and glitter frostily for a few seconds ; and life, deep, full, and abounding, was suggested to every sense by the rushing motion of the fabric on which we stood, by the sound of the hoarse pouring of froth forward, and by the steady streaming of the strong breeze out of the white and gleaming concavities of the spacious sails.

I stood close to the body, prayer-book in hand ; and alongside of me was Chestree, with his dismal face hanging down, and close behind stood Tapping. On the other side of the grating were the boatswain, the gunner, and the carpenter ; and the men, with their faces turned to the gangway, filled the decks down to the bulwarks, and from the companion to the main-hatch.

I am partial, of course : as we grow old we look back upon the past, and find that every-

thing then was better than it is now—the men taller and handsomer, the women prettier and more honest, sailors and soldiers braver, religion a deeper sentiment, our country more feared and admired by the world, and so on. I do not myself share in such prejudices : he must be a stupid old man who judges of the excellence of things by his capacity of enjoying them, as if the most aged swab now living would not find as many fine things flourishing to-day as there were four-score years ago, if he only had the eyes, nose, ears, and appetite of four-score years ago to bring to the banquet ; but this I *will* say, that remembering the ninety men who stood along the deck of the *Tigress* when we buried Peacock, I do honestly doubt whether the present age could match me such another ship's company—such a set of seamen of the old, salt, hearty, bushy-whiskered, manly type—so active, so sagacious, so determined. But let me remember the period. It was a time that had produced the noblest set of seamen our nation of sailors had ever given birth to. As, after a long succession of gales,

you will find the sea-shore strown with beautifully polished stones wrought to that perfection by the turbulent seas, so the wars this country had been engaged in had culminated, in the period I am writing of, in the production of as perfect a race of tars as ever walked the decks of English ships. That we shall never see such men at sea again I do not say; but it must cost us many years not only of hard but successful fighting to produce the like of them.

The ceremony was soon over. I briefly explained to the men the reason of the captain's absence, as he desired me; and when I began to read the Office, the flag was hoisted half-mast high at the peak, the end of the grating was placed upon the bulwark, and one of the bearers stood by to snatch off the ensign. The signal was given, the grating tilted, and the hammock sped from the side and clove the green water; at the same moment a gun was fired, the flag lowered, the white powder-smoke blew across the deck and fled in a compact gleaming cloud across the sea; the boatswain tuned

his pipe, the crowd of seamen broke up, and in a few moments the decks resumed their usual aspect.

When I went below, Shelvocke called me to his cabin, and in simple words thanked me for discharging the duty he had put upon me ; and there the subject dropped, nor did he ever again mention the name of Peacock, nor in the most distant manner allude to him during the short time I afterwards remained in the *Tigress*. He took charge of the boy's effects, which were brought to him by the steward shortly after the funeral ; and I cannot but suspect that he came across something belonging to the poor fellow that moved him particularly, for he remained in his cabin all the afternoon, leaving Chestree and me to eat our dinner alone ; and when he came on deck a little before sunset, he looked sorrowful and worn, much more so than he probably supposed, or I question if he would have shown himself by daylight.

And now, before I close this little incident of our cruise, I should like to ask what is a man to think of such a story as both Shelvocke

and Peacock related? Is it reasonable to believe that spirits do appear to men, or shall we explain the declarations which people have made, and solemnly and credibly made, of having beheld such apparitions, by assuming the possibility of an imagination powerful enough to dupe the reason by its fancies? Fortunately, it is a matter of no great consequence to human happiness, though I will not deny that such beliefs make life picturesque, and have even served directly useful ends, as, for instance, where an apparition has stopped a man from committing a robbery, and, better still, where a voice has caused a would-be murderer to take to his heels. Be this as it may, my log-book contains Peacock's story, and I have spun the yarn truthfully, and shall not attempt to make more of it.



CHAPTER II.

A SMART ENGAGEMENT.



ONDAY (such and such a date),
1812: latitude $24^{\circ} 2' N.$; longitude
 $54^{\circ} 17' W.$

The day had broken beautifully bright and clear upon an ocean stretching like a swelling sheet of quicksilver to the sharply-lined horizon. The wind that had carried us to this point had suddenly failed us; but we hoped it was coming again when, shortly after the sun had risen, the sea away in the north darkened into a deep and lovely blue under a glorious breeze, the hoarse and rushing sound of which we could hear long before it struck us. It held for an hour, driving us smoking through the water; then, to our deep

disgust, hauled round to the westward, and blew spitefully straight down the course we were heading. Worse still, it worked up a hazy atmosphere that narrowed the horizon with a driving mist that put me in mind of the North Sea in November ; only the vapour was so exceedingly close and *muggy*, that by shutting your eyes you would have imagined you were passing through the steam of a hot tank.

‘ One almost seems to taste the presence of Yellow Jack, ever at this distance from his home,’ said Shelvocke, sniffing and snuffling and wiping the humidity from his face.

He had once spoken of the Yellow Jack when talking of Madeline Palmer, and I suppose the mention of the subject recalled her to me. Strange, how widely different are the thoughts which chase each other through the mind ! I was surprised to find how vivid was my recollection of her. How many weeks had rolled by since I had danced with her at Lady Tempest’s ball ? and yet my memory retained every point of her as accurately as though I held a miniature of her

to my eyes : the dress she wore, the flower she had taken from her bosom (I had it in my cabin), her soft gleaming hair, the black fan by her side, the soft laugh in her eyes, her parted lips and sweet gravity when I spoke. Such an impression was surprising, truly. I never would have believed that any woman could, in a few hours, have left so clear and lasting an image of herself on my memory.

‘I say, Mr. Madison, mind you don’t tumble overboard ! You had better lay hold of one of those backstays if you mean to stop up there,’ sung out Shelvocke from the weather-side of the deck ; and wondering at the depth of the reverie that had suffered me to clamber on to the rail of the bulwark, and stand there holding on only with my feet, without knowing how I got there, and why I was there, I jumped down with a red face and walked aft.

Coming events cast their shadows before. Shakespeare himself never wrote a truer line than that, thou prince of lyrists, Thomas Campbell ! The shadow of a coming event

was assuredly upon me then, or why should I have stood pondering and musing over a girl whom I had only met once, whom I was quite sure I should never meet again, thinking over the dances we had danced together, of the silver fires which had sparkled in her eyes as she stood upon the moonlit lawn with me, and of the pensive little equivoke that had slipped from her lips when she handed me the flower I asked for?

Why, I say? Why on *that* day particularly? Why not yesterday, or a week or fortnight before? Jamaica still lay a long distance ahead of us; my persistent thinking of her could not have been owing to the neighbourhood of that island, where by this time, I might take it, she was installed, and viewing with accustomed eyes the black, brown, and yellow population of that sweltering, verdant, mountainous possession, and accepting the mosquito, the snake, the guana, and the bald-headed noisome vulture, the sudden deaths, the prompt funerals, as condiments specially provided by a bountiful nature solely to in-

crease the European's relish of tropical happiness.

'How does she go, Mr. Madison?' called out Shelvocke, who was sheltering himself under the pinnace from the moist blowing of the wind.

I started. *She*, thought I!

'West-nor-west, sir,' I answered, after creeping up the greasy deck, and peering at the card.

'Turning wool-gatherer!' he exclaimed, as I approached him. 'Are you sure it is west-nor-west?—or were you answering in Hamlet's vein?'

'No, sir,' I answered, laughing; 'we are heading as I said.'

Before Peacock's death he would have probed me to know what I was thinking of, and then have rallied me; but his spirits were low now compared to what they were, his joking mild and exceedingly short-lived.

'It is very strange,' said he, after a short pause, 'that we don't come across any vessels.'

* 'We must speak by the card, or equivocation will undo us.'

Luck has been against us ever since we quitted the Channel, so that Hannay's advice to stick to those waters has, I am bound to say, down to the present proved sound. I have made up my mind to run straight for Kingston and fish for news. It is certainly remarkable that nothing but that slaver should have hove in sight, considering the vast extent of water we have traversed.'

'I believe we made a mistake in running south after leaving the French coast,' I answered.

'I am sure of it. I ought to have stretched over into the American waters and worked off my parallels on that side. And here we are now, bothered by a head wind. You had better get the outer jib stowed; it will make her drier forward.'

I gave the order, and the jib was hauled down, slatting violently and rattling the hanks like a shower of penny pieces flung upon a pavement. The wind was as strong as we needed, steady, and the sea moderate; the schooner was being sailed so close that the

weather-leeches were rippling like flags, and the seas running almost straight at her, made her chop up and down so viciously that her progress was marked by a surface of foam as broad and wild as a line-of-battle ship would have flung off.

The weather had certainly an odd look, a hazy blue sky overhead, thin sheets of mist which closed and opened, sometimes giving us a view of the natural horizon, sometimes narrowing the visible circumference of the sea down to within a league ; a fiery, confused sun, like the eye of a man angered by drink, flinging down a wild white light upon a space of leaping violet-coloured seas lustrous with breaking surges. It was real tropical weather, however ; I knew it well ; the only two bad points of it were, it obscured the view and headed us out of course.

The morning crawled away. At dinner-time the sea was still covered by the driving mist ; constant showers of spray swept over the decks and made the planks smell like seaweed ; but in spite of these cooling libations, the sun was so fiercely hot that

the pitch betwixt the seams was as soft as putty.

‘Positively,’ said I, as we seated ourselves at the dinner-table, ‘one might imagine that the sunlight to-day consisted of an endless succession of vicious insects. It is one long sting.’

‘Not an hour ago,’ exclaimed Chestree, ‘I clapped my hand on the back of my neck—the sun being behind me—under the full belief that somebody had stuck a mustard-poultice upon it. It was like having one’s skin peeled off.’

‘Well, here is enough pricking—so let us hope that something wicked this way comes,’ said Shelvocke. ‘Pea-soup, I perceive, and boiling hot, of course,’ drawing hastily back as the steward whipped off the cover of the tureen and let a cloud of steam soar up. ‘A nice drink for this temperature!’

It was death to me to look at it, but Chestree passed his plate for a second helping.

‘I am very fond of pea-soup,’ said he; and as he hung over the steaming fluid, I thought of Miss Hawkins’s description of Samuel

Johnson eating a veal-pie stuffed with 'plumbs' —the perspiration, the veins standing in cords upon the forehead, the slop, slop of the spoon.

'Phew, captain! the wind-sail wouldn't be amiss,' said I; 'the atmosphere has been heated by twenty degrees since Chestree begun that second plate of soup:' and to my great comfort the order to hoist the wind-sail was given, and the big canvas funnel breezed sweetly into the hot interior.

'Happy is he,' said Shelvocke, looking earnestly at Chestree, 'whose stomach is not impatient of the equinoxes. The true Briton is a man who will eat anything anywhere; calipash in the West, curry in the East, pea-soup on the Equator. The nearer he draws to the sun the hotter he likes his food.'

'Pea-soup only makes you hot whilst you're eating it, sir,' exclaimed Chestree, as if he thought an apology was wanted from him. 'It cools you afterwards.'

'Still, though I sneer,' said Shelvocke, 'I am looking forward to my calipash. As you know, Madison, I am quite an alderman in my veneration for the turtle. Strange that

so monstrous a conformation should enshrine such ecstatic fat. The man who first tasted him must have been a courageous creature. I should have required the experiences of at least three generations of digestions to have dared such a feat.'

A step was heard on the companion-ladder, and Tapping, hat in hand, put his head down.

'There's a sail in sight, sir, about a point on the weather-bow. She is only to be seen now and again when the mist clears.'

'Go and see what you can make of her, Madison,' said Shelvocke.

I jumped up and went on deck.

'Whereaway is your stranger, Tapping?' said I, staring into the blank horizon ahead.

He pointed, and I peered, but nothing was in sight.

'The mist has rolled down over her again, sir,' he exclaimed. 'But you'll see her by keeping your eye on that part of the sea for a few moments.'

I stood looking and looking.

'Very strange, Tapping; your ship is a long while heaving in sight. Surely you

haven't mistaken some dark patch of mist—like that yonder—for a vessel,' said I, pointing to a small circular shadow that I myself should have taken to be a sail but for the speed with which the long struggling wreath of vapour that held it was sweeping athwart our hawse.

'Why, I don't think I could have been deceived,' said he, looking rather puzzled, however. 'What I saw was uncommonly like a ship, and the mist opened her twice before I reported her, sir.'

'Forward there!' I sung out; 'did anyone sight a sail on the starboard-bow just now?'

'No, sir.'

'Depend upon it, Tapping, you have been deceived by some flaw in the vapour yonder. However, keep a bright look-out;' and so saying, I dived below to finish my dinner.

'There's nothing in sight, sir,' I exclaimed, resuming my knife and fork. 'The fog must have misled Tapping. It's as thick as the lees of a bottle of loaded port. Chestree, kindly pass me the brandy.'

‘I thought the news of a sail being in sight was rather too good to be true,’ said Shelvocke, ruefully.

At that moment I heard a voice on the forecastle hailing the quarter-deck. Tapping made some answer that I could not catch, and I saw Shelvocke prick up his ears. In a few seconds the wind-sail was shoved on one side by the third mate poking his head through the skylight.

‘It *was* a ship I saw, sir,’ he sung out. ‘The fog’s hidden her again, but the look-out reported her this time, so there’s no mistake.’

‘How did she seem to be heading, Mr. Tapping?’ asked Shelvocke.

‘She is on the starboard tack, sir, apparently going our way, but not lying so close; for she’s right ahead now, rather to leeward, if anything.’

We hastily finished dinner, and I followed Shelvocke on deck, where we stood, armed each of us with a glass, ready for the first glimpse of the stranger.

‘Now if this wind would only shift a point we should have a clear horizon,’ said Shel-

vocke, impatiently biting the end off a cigar, and clasping his glass betwixt his knees whilst he irritably hammered at the flint of his tinder-box.

‘There she is at last, sir!’ I cried, as the mist thinned away on the horizon ahead, like the moisture of your breath upon a looking-glass, and displayed the hull and spars of a large vessel under easy canvas.

We both pointed our glasses. The ship was not more than five miles off, and we had her plain. The sun, being behind us, flung its misty radiance over our mastheads upon her, and the light sparkled in the windows and gilt carving of the high stern of what was seemingly a large West Indiaman. Her masts were focussed into one from our point of view, but I could tell by her yards that she was a full-rigged ship. She had a single reef in her topsails, and a main-topgallant-sail set; but just before a whole cloud of mist blew over her and hid her, she set her mainsail and fore and mizzen-topgallant-sails, and I could see some hands crawling aloft to shake out the reefs—as I surmised.

‘Gone again, just as I was beginning to take her in!’ cried Shelvocke, making his glass ring as he angrily drove the tubes into one another. ‘What do you suspect her to be, Mr. Madison?’

‘A West Indiaman without doubt, sir; and an Englishman, I am afraid.’

‘Why English? deuce take her if she prove so! I’m in the mood for a change, man: I want to see a few foreigners.’

We waited and watched. Presently there was the ship again heeling under all three royals, and foaming through the water about three points on our lee-bow.

‘Oh ho! that’s the time of day, is it?’ shouted Shelvocke. ‘Tiller there! starboard your helm—starboard you may! so—keep her full now. Ease away that main-sheet. Lay aft some hands and set the gaff-topsail. She wants to get quit of us, does she? Ease off those fore-sheets! tail on to the outer jib-halliards—loose the flying jib!’

He sprang over to the weather-side of the deck and cast an eager look at the trim of the

canvas, and, apparently satisfied, came back to where I stood, and exclaimed with a chuckle :

‘ We’ll talk to her, be she what she will !’

Freed from the griping luff that had choked half the wind out of her sails, and with many additional cloths upon her, the *Tigress* rushed through the water like a comet ; the whirring, crackling, sparkling foam fled past with a velocity that made the eye that watched it reel again ; the wind boomed with a thunder-note out of the immense hollow of the main-sail, and every sail was as hard as stone under the pressure. The relieving tackles were manned, for the tiller kept the two powerful men who grasped it dancing like a couple of monkeys on the bough of a tree. The mist was blowing away fast, though from time to time lines of it would sweep across the ship ahead, and obscure her, but not so as to embarrass our pursuit. Her press of canvas was dragging her channels under. It was a sight to witness the foam fly out at right angles with her hull in long glistening streams, like jets from a force-pipe, as the chains ripped up

the water, whilst to windward her black side and the copper under it glanced against the white tops of the deep green of the waves—ebony chased with gold and ivory.

‘We are overhauling her fast!’ exclaimed Shelvocke, in a voice ringing with excitement. ‘Pipe the hands to quarters’ (there was no beating of drums aboard the *Tigress*); ‘get the nettings triced up, and close the hatches. Were she English she would face us.’

As the crew were bustling to stations, I caught sight of a spot of colour on the taff-rail of the ship: it fluttered, struggled, soared, and stood out like a board at the peak.

‘The stripes and stars, as I am a man!’ cried Shelvocke. ‘But we’ll have no juggling this time; so hoist away our ensign, Mr. Tapping, and let them know the worst.’

‘In spite of that Yankee flag, sir,’ I exclaimed, after narrowly inspecting the ship with the glass, ‘I will *swear* that’s she’s English. Indeed I am greatly mistaken if I have not seen the vessel before. If she prove to be what I suspect she is, then we

may suppose that she has hoisted the American flag under the impression that we are one of Jonathan's privateers.'

'She has the truth now, anyway,' answered Shelvocke, with a glance at our ensign; 'but she's not English, I tell you, or she'd shorten sail and receive us—she wouldn't run; or if she's an English vessel, she has a foreign crew aboard, of that I'm *certain*.'

'Time will prove,' said I, ogling the ship's stern shrewdly, in the hope of finding her name; but if any letters were there, they were so involved in ornamentation as to be indistinguishable.

We gained on her foot by foot, and when within range let fly a gun at her as a hint to heave to; but she paid no attention to this challenge. Nobody was visible aboard of her but a fellow dressed in a white jacket and jean pantaloons and a red cap, whose tall figure, as he stood upon the rail over the weather quarter-gallery, with his arm round the vang watching us, made a conspicuous object.

The dress of this man, however, went a

long way to confirm Shelvocke's suspicion, that, if the ship was an Englishman, she had fallen among thieves.

All at once they let go the royal and top-gallant halliards and hauled up their courses, put their helm down, and, throwing their vessel almost athwart our hawse, fired a broadside of seven guns at us. The manœuvre—full of reckless audacity, as it not only imperilled their spars, but very nearly put the ship in irons—was executed with an abruptness that would have taken away the breath of any man less alert than Shelvocke : but almost simultaneously with the shifting of their helm, he motioned to the men at the schooner's tiller. The *Tigress* fell off, and the ship's broadside-discharge flew wide of the mark to windward of us. There was a pause of a minute or two, while we flew down upon the enemy, who was slowly paying off. The instant she presented her stern at us, we raked her with five guns. Heavy as was the thunder of the explosion, we could hear the grape and round shot tearing along her decks, the smashing of glass, the splinter-

ing of wood, mingled with loud shrieks ; and at the same moment that we fired, the sail-trimmers whipped half the canvas off the schooner, and there were we to windward, under jib and foresail only, and within hailing distance of the ship.

So close, indeed, that we could clearly distinguish the faces of the half-naked men surging about the gun-ports as they worked the cannons. The man in the red cap, who had been watching us, was evidently in command ; flourishing an immense pistol, he darted here and there, and his cap seemed to twinkle in half-a-dozen places at once ; he was a giant in stature, and brandished his arms like a windmill. Through the gun-ports we could see a number of mulattoes and negroes among the crew, and some white men and negroes were clustered in the main-top, and discharged muskets at our decks as fast as they could load them, and a constant succession of tiny white puffs of smoke blew away from among them through the top-mast rigging.

It was as clear as the sun now that the ship

was an English West Indiaman, in charge of a prize crew—whether Yankee, French, or pirate could not yet be known. But there was no time for observation or conjecture. The moment we took up our position to windward, the guns of each vessel began their infernal din. How can any man describe such a scene! It was all crash and fury, the sparking out of tongues of red flame, a smother of choking, sulphur-flavoured smoke, a dull trembling throughout the length and breadth of the schooner, the whistling of hurtling iron missiles, the crackling of wood, and a roaring of human voices. The very wind seemed awed by the fiendish hullabaloo, and the smoke from our guns drove sluggishly down upon the enemy, and, mingling with the white clouds which rose from her decks, sailed in a large fog along the green waters to leeward.

‘Aim at that red-capped fellow, some of you small-arms men!’ shouted Shelvocke, pointing to the giant, who, regardless of the danger of the exposed position, had jumped on to the bulwarks before the mizzen-rigging,

and stood there yelling to his fellows, and pointing with his pistol to us.

Half-a-dozen muskets were levelled ; they flashed at the moment our two after-guns were fired ; the man leaped in the air and vanished behind the bulwarks. Now, thought I, the rascals are without a leader : when lo ! there was the cap twinkling over the rail again, and presently the whole giant forked up, and stood vociferating and motioning to his men upon the identical spot from which I imagined we had shot him down.

Crash ! down topples her main-topgallant-mast.

‘ How come your shot to be flying so high ? Hull her, men—hull her ! ’ roars Shelvocke.

What is that object swaying to and fro as it slowly soars to the main-top ? A boat’s gun, by heaven ! And see those black rascals up there fling down their muskets to steady the tackle, and make ready to sway the piece into the top ! I notice the men stationed at our foremost carronade elevate their gun : the live fuse touches the priming, and the gaping muzzle belches forth an ocean of fire and

smoke ; a ringing cheer peals forth, and when I look, the boat-gun has vanished, the tackle idly beats the mast in whips, and a wounded black, shrieking in his agony, and lolling head down, and hands hanging over the edge of the top, suddenly shoots heels over head and whizzes through the air. A murderous discharge is at this moment fired at us from three of the enemy's forward guns : the shower of white splinters fly from our forecastle-rail, and the parted fore-topgallant-stay swings quickly into the mast ; the gaff of the foresail floats down with the white folds of the sail, and smothers a group of small-arms men in the waist.

‘No matter, my lads ! The sail's a rag, and well doused. Aft here, and rattle up this mainsail !’

By this time the two vessels had drawn close together. There was not half a ship's length between them. Our shot had already knocked two of the enemy's gun-ports into one, her sides were studded with shot, and her bulwarks were like a sieve. What the slaughter was we could not see. On the other

hand, our hull was badly hurt ; moment after moment our men were being taken away ; and it was easily seen that, if this battering was not soon terminated, the ship would fight herself clear of us.

Indeed, such fierceness and obstinacy on the part of the enemy was quite unexpected by us. They were fighting their ship like demons. We could see the men flinging the dead and wounded, as fast as they dropped down, out of the way, as if they were sacks of biscuit. Though the vessels were so close together that the flames of the enemy's guns scorched our people away from their quarters at every broadside, the men of the Indiaman never swerved from their stations, though just before we boarded I saw a whole fathom of fire dart out of one of our amidship guns into the thick of a cluster of the Indiaman's crew, and blast and wither and shrivel up half-a-dozen of the unhappy wretches into olive-coloured rags, yet the survivors held their ground, and rattled their gun out again, and exploded it with a derisive yell. Our metal was heavier, but they had

the advantage of elevation ; and resolving to end the bloody and fiery business by a *coup de main*, Shelvocke motioned for the helm to be put over, and the next moment the two vessels were grinding their sides against each other.

A dozen blacks and white men, headed by the giant in the red cap, succeeded in tumbling into the waist, where a furious hand-to-hand struggle commenced. Aft, Shelvocke was the first to spring aboard the enemy, I was next him, and behind were thirty or forty of the *Tigresses*.

Of what followed I cannot pretend to give a close account. I remember hacking and hewing with my cutlass at the netting, clambering over and through it, and tumbling down on my nose over the bulwarks of the ship ; gaining my feet and seeing Shelvocke and a number of men making the air brilliant with the gleaming sweep of their cutlasses ; joining them, and finding myself stabbing, thrusting, parrying, half-blinded by blood, whether my own or other people's I did not know, opposed by a furious mob of human-

beings, half of them negroes, most of them naked to the waist : and yet in this moment of wild excitement, stunned by the hideous yelling of the blacks, and the fierce execrations of the whites who cursed and raved at us in our own tongue, stumbling over corpses, ropes, boarding-pikes, sliding about on grape-shot rolling over the deck, stunned one moment by the weight of a heavy body flinging against me in a headlong fall—even in this moment, I say, certain minute occurrences and things were vividly flashed upon my perception, just as a man takes note of objects during a glare of lightning. I remember, for instance, the demoniacal expression on the face of a herculean negro as he let drive a boarding-pike at my breast, my momentary sense of despair as I dropped my cutlass to catch and wrestle with the weapon, and the joy that gave me back tenfold my strength when he tossed up his hands, leaving the pike in my grasp, and coughed and sputtered up a fountain of dark blood, and fell backwards, shot through the lungs. I remember looking at Shelvocke, though the

glance must have been instantaneous, and observing the prodigious strength expressed by his towering form, as, with his coat wrenched off his back, his massive, knotted arm bared above the elbow, his face dark with blood and the grime of powder, he *mowed* with his cutlass among the writhing, struggling, hooting mob, whom foot by foot we were driving forward.

‘Aloft, some hands!’ he shouted, ‘and clear those vermin out of the main-top!’

I turned to lead the way, but Tapping was before me; he was followed by half-a-dozen of our men, and I forgot them a moment after, as I rounded again to the demons who opposed us. A fierce-faced, bearded, white man, rendered ghastly beyond description by a wound across his forehead, that had let fall a flap of skin over his left eye, levelled a pistol at me; I ducked, and the shot flew over my head. I sprang at him, and then—‘O God!’ I remember crying, and consciousness fled from me in a flash of fire.



CHAPTER III.

THE NAMUR.



OPENED my eyes, and the first object they rested upon was the highly-whiskered, brown, and honest face of Parell, the boatswain's mate who headed my watch.

‘ Mercy on me, Parell, where am I ? ’ I exclaimed, as he whipped his body erect with astonishment on finding me alive. ‘ Here, give me your hand, my good fellow ; ’ and seizing his fist, I hauled myself on to my legs, staggered, reeled, was caught by the man, and lodged safely on the step of a carronade slide.

The fight was over ; the West Indiaman was ours : but great heaven, what a sight

fast, had a fierce bite, so I tied a pocket-handkerchief round my unfortunate pate, and walked over to Shelvocke. He looked up.

‘Good Lord, what a face, Madison!’ he gasped out. ‘But welcome back to life. I thought I saw you dead.’

‘And you, sir?’

‘Untouched, though almost despatched by my own exertions. But see—but see what a number of our brave fellows these murderous Yankee pirates have cost us!’ and he ran his grieved eyes over the prone bodies.

‘And how long can I have been dead—do you know, sir?’

‘Why, not above five minutes, I should think. We have only just driven the last of the batch below. How they fought! Those blacks are fiends! in their very death-agonies some of them buried their teeth in the flesh of our wounded. What enemies to oppose to white men!’ he exclaimed, still fetching his breath with labour. ‘Has the schooner suffered much? My eyes so smart with the powder-smoke that I can hardly see out of

them,' he added, nodding towards the *Tigress*, who had drawn ahead of the ship by about a cable's-length, and lay hove to with her canvas shaking.

'So far as I can make out, her rigging is a good deal cut up, and her mainsail is a perfect Milky-way of shot-holes,' I answered; 'but her spars look all right, sir.'

'The Lord be praised for that!' said he, rising. 'Their last two broadsides were ferocious enough to drive us out of water. But heaven and earth, what a massacre!' he cried, clasping his hands with a vehement gesture as he ran his eye over the deck. 'Look! I can count seven of our men dead between this and the main-hatch!'

'Surely there cannot be many prisoners below, sir,' said I. 'There is slaughter enough here to account for the whole of the ship's crew.'

'We drove about a dozen or twenty of them under,' he answered. 'There should have been two score at least when we boarded, but they melted away as we slowly settled them forward like a handful of sand

through the fingers. You had better take some men below, Madison, and explore the cabin, while I signal the schooner. Have you seen anything of Tapping ?'

'There he is yonder, sir, near the fore-hatch.'

He hailed the third mate, who limped heavily as he made his way aft.

In the meantime I called to Parell, and another seaman named Bowman, to follow me; and picking up a cutlass I descended the companion-steps and entered the cabin. I advanced cautiously, for there was no guessing who was below, and what reception awaited the first explorer of those regions. We found ourselves in a large deserted cabin, or saloon, most luxuriously and handsomely fitted. Accustomed as I was to the sumptuous cabin-trappings of Indiamen, I was astonished by the beauty and taste exhibited in this place. The bulkheads were furnished with tall mirrors; rich curtains hung in front of the doors of the berths which were partitioned off from the cabin; trays of flowers and globes of fish swung from the ceiling;

the mizzen-mast, that pierced the two decks, was painted and decorated so as to resemble a column of elaborately-carved marble: and what with velvet chairs and sofas, sparkling brass-lamps, skylights enriched with ferns, dark and lustrous oak-panelling, and a tall, picturesquely-ornamented pianoforte at the back of the mizzen-mast, the cabin seemed like a drawing-room in a royal residence.

There were some decanters of wine, glasses, plates, a dish of biscuits, and a cold ham on the table; where they looked to have been hastily placed and hastily left; there was a fork with a piece of ham stuck on it upon a plate, and a biscuit alongside of it with the mark of a bite, and a wine-glass lay on its side amid a little pool of sherry.

All these things were noted by me as I advanced, but on facing a mirror I came to a dead stop, aghast at the monstrous figure reflected in it.

‘Good heavens, Parell!’ I muttered, observing the two fellows grinning behind me. ‘Can that fearful thing be ME?’

My face was covered with grime and blood that had hardened into a black mask over my eyebrows and on my left cheek ; but shocking as this discolouration and the *character* of it made my countenance, the whole expression was rendered inexpressibly hideous by the stained white pocket-handkerchief I had tied around my head and knotted under my chin, so as to cause my beard to project like a frill, or the dorsal fin of a shark. In addition to this, my shirt, like Shelvocke's, hung in several rags from my shoulders, and the left leg of my trousers had been split up as high as my knee. My horror of my own aspect so heightened the ghastly appearance of my face, that the proverbial extremes met. I looked, turned away, and burst out laughing.

‘ Lord, what a ghost I should make ! ’ I shouted. ‘ What a Banquo—what a Hamlet’s father—what a Witch of Endor ! ’

“ Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear,
The arm’d rhinoceros or the Hyrcan tiger,
Take *any* shape but that—— ”

I stopped short, petrified by the apparition of

a long yellow face projected beyond one of the curtains that quivered like a blowing flag in the shaking hand of the individual who had drawn it aside. The face was as yellow as butter, and had the moist shine of butter, too; it had a long aquiline nose, perfectly round, black, bloodshot eyes, and was crowned with a mat of intensely black hair. It looked at me, and I looked at it; it dodged once or twice, like the head of a person who makes a feint of hiding; it then forked out, slowly drawing after it a long, thin figure, dressed in black, supported upon a pair of knock-kneed legs, cased in stockings like a bishop's, and terminating in a pair of square, flat shoes, freighted with enormous silver buckles.

‘Gracious goodness!’ he ejaculated, looking at me from top to toe. ‘Are you a man or a walking corpse? God have mercy upon us! Such horrors, one after another, might turn the brain of the unthinking beast of the field!’

I immediately perceived that he was a passenger, and as there was no time for parleying, I explained who I was, and the

character of the vessel that had captured the ship. I never saw any human face more agitated than his when I told him that we were Englishmen, and that the ship was our prize. He rushed at me with extended arms, clasped his hands round my neck, and sobbed out the wildest exclamations of joy like any woman in hysterics.

‘And you tell me that the American pirates have been vanquished? and that this ship is in possession of honourable Englishmen?’ he shouted, breaking away from me and shooting about on his long, thin legs; and then darting aft, he drew back the curtains hanging in front of the berths, one after the other, with a vehemence that made the rings rattle again on the brass rods, and flung open the doors, shouting as he turned the handles :

‘Colonel Bray, we are saved, sir! Mrs. Montague and family, we are in the hands of Englishmen and friends! Miss Palmer, Mr. Johnson, Mr. and Mrs. Solomons, come forth, come forth! We are saved, I tell you! The pirates are defeated! We are under British colours once more! Hooray!’

He uttered three distinct and vigorous cheers ; and such was the contrast between his extravagant joy and his solemn costume, the carnal raptures expressed by his legs and their spiritual structure, that nothing but the reflection of my person in one of the looking-glasses, and my annoyance that ladies would be among the spectators of my deplorable figure, could have restrained my laughter. Indeed, I had never contemplated the possibility of ladies being below when I undertook to explore the cabin, nor, until a mirror confronted me, had I any idea of the frightfulness of my appearance.

However, I was too late to escape, though when the yellow-faced man fell a-bawling to the others to come forth, I cowered behind Parell and his mate, who, grimy as they were, looked civilised and Christian men alongside of me.

A number of ladies and gentlemen came running out of the berths until the cabin seemed full of people. I bobbed behind the seamen, looking at the passengers as they emerged, all talking at once ; but my eye

lighting on a face—pale, grey-eyed, full of sweetness, sorrow and fear—my heart seemed to stop beating, the blood tingled through me until my fingers felt as if buried in an ants' nest.

'Merciful powers!' thought I, 'it is Madeline Palmer!' I could scarcely believe my eyes—but there she stood, to the right of the mast, the outermost figure of the little crowd, gazing at me and my men, with eyebrows arched with horror. My stupefaction passed quickly. 'Pish!' I said to myself, 'she'll never know me in this figure:' and parting the two fellows who had stood right in front of me, I stepped forth.

The ladies screamed, and there was a general recoil, more especially on the part of Mrs. Solomons—an immensely fat West-Indian Jewess, who backed so violently into the waistcoat of a slightly-built gentleman, who turned out to be Colonel Bray, that she pinned, crushed, and nearly suffocated him against the bulkhead.

'I am sorry,' said I, 'to be obliged to appear before ladies in this trim; but the

engagement has been a severe one, and I have really had no time to change my clothes. However, ladies and gentlemen, pray do not be alarmed. We are Englishmen, and have regained this vessel, which we supposed was captured by an American privateer. Your persons and property are safe, and you will be under weigh for Kingston, Jamaica, as soon as the decks are cleared and the vessels refitted.'

I looked hard at Miss Palmer as I spoke, to see if she 'twigged' me, but, though there was plenty of speculation in her beautiful eyes, there was no recognition. All horror had left her, however, and she was one of the first to press forward to grasp my hand.

And then began one of those ordeals I abominate. In all, there were eleven passengers, including a baby; and I was nearly suffocated by them as they pressed around me. Such sobbing! such short peals of hysteric laughter!—everybody shaking hands; women kissing; the baby taking fright and squalling; Mrs. Solomons swooning away and recovering, at the expense of her gown,

that had to be cut off her back ; Mr. Johnson, a bald-headed, fat little man, bouncing up to me again and again to grasp my hands and thank me for his life and liberty ; Colonel Bray forcing wine upon me and my men ; the yellow-faced man cutting capers around me, and calling me his guardian angel—it was more than I could stand.

‘Gentlemen, we have our work on deck ; meanwhile I will ask you to remain below with the ladies, and on no account to suffer them to leave the cabin until the ship is cleared.’ and so saying I made a bow, and mounted the companion-steps, thankful to heaven to have escaped Miss Palmer’s recognition, and horribly distressed that any woman’s eye should have beheld my blood-stained face and torn garments.

I found Shelvocke watching Corney at work among the bodies, separating the dead from the wounded ; and as fast as he pronounced a body dead, some men attached a shot to its feet and dropped it overboard. There was no time for ceremony : the sun was within an hour of his setting, the heat in-

creased as the wind failed, much work was needed aloft ; but it was necessary to clear the decks first, and cleanse the ship of the ghastly relics of the struggle.

‘ There are eleven passengers below, sir,’ said I to Shelvocke.

‘ Ladies ?’ he asked.

‘ Five ladies, a nurse and a baby, and four gentlemen.’

‘ And what did they take you to be ?’ said he, glancing at me with a smile that the grime on his face made exceedingly odd. ‘ You look like a portrait of old Mother Shipton with that handkerchief round your head. I hope you stopped them from coming on deck ?’ running his eyes over his own clothes.

‘ Yes, sir ; and I have posted a man half-way up the companion-steps, in case their curiosity should master them. Whom think you makes one of the ladies ?’

‘ I have no idea.’

‘ Miss Palmer—the young lady I danced with at Lady Tempest’s.’

He looked hard at me to see if I was in earnest.

‘Strange indeed!’ he exclaimed: ‘and yet not so very strange either, considering that she was to sail for the West Indies much about the time we quitted Plymouth. Did she know you?’

‘I hope not.’

‘Anyway she couldn’t have seen your blushes. Curious things do happen in this world, which is much smaller than people think, even at sea. Look at them tossing the dead overboard! So many of our men, too! I dread the hour for the muster-roll to be called. I am sorry to say that Chestree is badly hurt—stabbed by the red-capped ruffian who boarded the *Tigress*.’

‘It has been a bloody business, captain.’

‘It has indeed. How does your head feel?’

‘As though a little warm water would freshen me up, sir.’

‘Then see here, Madison; jump into that boat, and get aboard the *Tigress* and dress your head. You can afterwards return and relieve me. Be as quick as you can, as I want you to take charge here.’

‘Ay, ay, sir,’ said I, mightily thankful for the chance of boarding the schooner. I dropped into the gig that lay alongside with three men in her, we shoved off, and in a few minutes I was in my cabin.

The steward brought me a can of warm water and bathed my head; the wound was on the scalp, very sore indeed to the touch, and I had evidently lost a great deal of blood: however, I felt pretty hearty when I was washed and my clothes changed. I told the steward to make up a small bundle of linen and throw it into the boat; and while he did this, I peeped into Chestree’s cabin. The poor fellow was asleep, but looked so ghastly I thought he was dead, until I put my ear to his mouth. I closed the door gently, bidding the steward give an eye to him; and as I went to the gangway to get into the boat, I saw a pile of dead lying against the galley, and some of the crew of the schooner swabbing the deck, whilst others were at work aloft. I called to the boatswain and asked after the wounded.

‘There are eight dead, and nineteen down,

sir; and of them I fear near half a score'll never see the sun rise again. It's been a murderous action!' he exclaimed sadly.

'I am glad to find you unhurt,' said I. 'The wounded have been seen to, I hope?'

'Yes, sir, after a fashion. Mr. Corney has coopered 'em as well as time allowed. I suppose there'll be a boat-load aboard the prize?'

'Ay, the slaughter there has been dreadful. What are those dead, yonder?' I asked, pointing to the bodies near the galley.

'Most of 'em the chaps who boarded us, sir. Not a man escaped. But that red-capped cove must ha' been Satan himself. I don't know as ever I see or heerd of any man fighting like him, nor giving so much trouble to kill. I shot him twice, another stabbed him in the back, another cut him over the shou^lder, and I see the cutlass jammed there so as not to be drawed out, and the man went on fighting some minutes after that, and stabbed Mr. Chestree afore he dropped. As to the niggers, they was like sharks. Had you cut 'em into twenty bits, it's my belief

that every piece would ha' gone on fighting on its own account. Talk o' the 'Mericans not having spunk! they're bull-dogs in breeches, sir; and jine 'em with British sailors, and the whole world made into one fleet couldn't resist them.'

'No doubt, no doubt. Keep close to the ship, bo'sun; the captain will be aboard of you shortly,' said I, and jumped into the boat and was rowed back to the prize.

I found Shelvocke at the gangway waiting for me, and the moment I stepped over the side he laid hold of the side-ropes in his impatience to be gone, and stood talking to me with one foot on the ladder.

'All the dead are overboard,' said he, 'and you will now send the wounded in charge of Corney to the schooner as fast as you can. I find there are thirty of the *Tigress's* men aboard here, of whom you will keep fifteen; but let the whole thirty turn to at once and solder your spars and rigging. There are twelve prisoners whom you had better send to me. You may also tell the passengers that they are at liberty to remain

with you or shift themselves into the schooner.'

I touched my hat, and he dropped into the boat.

The evening that had insensibly stolen around us was as lovely and clear as the morning had been thick and unsettled. The wind had slackened into a gentle breeze that was just brisk enough to cool one's face and keep the water twinkling. The setting sun was filling sea and sky with heavenly colours, purple in the west and amber in the east, and a haze of pink that left the water-line sharp as the rim of a glass lens all round the horizon, and overhead a deep, unspeakable tropical blue, and under us a sea of melting green.

My first and pressing duty was to despatch the wounded in the schooner's cutter, but the job of getting the poor creatures into her was one of the most painful I had ever undertaken. However, it was imperatively necessary that they should be transferred to the *Tigress*, as there would be no one to doctor them aboard the ship when Corney was gone.

It was touching to see how tenderly their shipmates handled them, whispering soothing or encouraging words as they lowered them one by one over the side. Nor were they one jot less humane in their handling of the wounded whites of the ship's crew; but though they were merciful enough with the blacks and mulattoes, their abhorrence of them was strongly expressed in their faces and their sharp disgustful recoils when addressed or touched by them.

'You wouldn't believe how they fought, sir,' said Parell to me. 'One of them was found dead with his teeth locked in the hand of Jim Baines, and afore they could get the poor fellow's hand out of the brute's mouth Mr. Corney had to lash a couple o' marline-spikes together like a pair o' shears, and even then it took two of us to prize the nigger's jaws open.'

A dismal boatload they made: to this day my memory is haunted by the white men's low moans, the peculiar short thick grunts of the negroes, the hollow suffering faces, the blood-stained clothes, the rolling eyes of the

blacks, and their shining fangs gleaming betwixt their bulbous drawn lips and giving a most unearthly character to the ashen-black of their faces. Thankful enough I was when, the last man having been lowered, I gave the order to the boat's crew to shove off. I then turned up the rest of the men to refit, and went below to offer a choice of vessels to the passengers.

My heart thumped as I descended the companion-steps. I had not had much time to think of the strangeness of this meeting of mine with Miss Palmer; and though, as you know, she had often been in my thoughts, the idea that in all human probability we should never meet again had stopped me from realising the tenacity of the hold taken by the grapnel she had flung into my heart from the very first moment of our getting alongside of one another at the Plymouth ball. I appreciated the strength of that grip now, and understood its significance by the uncomfortably nervous flutter that bothered my brain, like an angry popple under a light craft.

But shove ahead, man—shove ahead! So down I went, wondering whether it was my nerves or the temperature that made my face burn, and plumped headlong among the passengers, every one of whom—baby and all—was assembled near the table, sitting or standing.

Hat in hand, I made them a polite bow, and immediately perceived that not one of them recognised in me the ghastly figure that had confronted them three quarters of an hour before. Miss Palmer was standing near Colonel Bray, and the moment I hove in sight she fixed her eyes upon me—that much I saw—and I also noticed that she eyed me intently, and that a little colour stole into her cheeks.

‘I am deputed by the commander of the schooner, ladies and gentlemen,’ said I, ‘to inform you that both vessels will be under sail shortly, and that if any of you would prefer to occupy the schooner for the remainder of the journey, you will be very welcome to such accommodation as she has to offer.’

The gentlemen looked at one another, and then at the ladies.

‘We are extremely obliged for the offer,’ said Colonel Bray. ‘I have the pleasure, I presume, of addressing one of the officers of the vessel to whose gallant crew we are indebted for our rescue?’

‘I am her chief mate, sir,’ I replied, with a bow.

‘I have been examining your schooner through my cabin window,’ continued the colonel, ‘and observe that she is a very beautiful, powerful, and well-armed boat. After our disastrous experience in this Indian-man, whose crew, I regret to say, struck to the American privateer without firing a shot—without firing a shot,’ he repeated warmly and indignantly—‘I, for one, am strongly disposed to accept your captain’s polite offer to use his vessel.’

‘But will the gentleman be pleased to tell us whether we run any danger by remaining in this vessel?’ exclaimed a dusty-looking, big-nosed, black-eyed old man, whose yellow gers were brilliant with rings, and under

whose highly-flowered waistcoat there hung, by the bight of a chain, enough seals and gewgaws to furnish out a jeweller's shop.

'Mr. Jonas Solomons, sir,' said Colonel Bray, introducing the old fellow to me with a wave of the hand.

'Why, Mr. Solomons,' I replied, 'the schooner is not only the better-armed, but she will be the better-manned vessel. But as she will convoy us, and as the run to Kingston cannot prove a very long one, I do not see, as regards the security offered, that there will be much to choose between the two vessels.'

'You hear what the gentleman says, Jonas,' said Mrs. Solomons, fanning her fat, treble-chinned face, and resembling an inflated balloon in the green silk dress she had substituted for the gown that had been ripped off her back. 'Mind, I leave it to you!'

'Who will command this ship, thir?' asked Mr. Solomons.

'I,' I replied.

'What do you say, Mr. Culpepper?' ob-

served Colonel Bray, addressing the yellow-faced man in gaiters.

‘Why, I am certainly for placing myself under the guardianship of our brave rescuers,’ replied Mr. Culpepper. ‘In simpler language,’ he added, pulling out a snuff-box, ‘I’m for the schooner.’

‘And so am I,’ said Mrs. Montague, a red-faced, rather untidy-looking woman, slackly-rigged about the bosom and with her cap awry, as if most of her time was spent in nursing the baby and fighting with it. ‘When I think of the risk my blessed tootle-torums has run, I vow I would rather finish the voyage on a bare raft in company with our brave rescuers than in this dreadful ship;’ and here she snatched her baby from the nurse, threw her spare arm round the neck of a girl of about fourteen years old, was clasped round the waist by another daughter who looked a full-grown woman, and a most pathetic tableau was formed, the effect of which was considerably heightened by both daughters sobbing and the baby screaming.

‘You will please understand that some of

the men belonging to the schooner will act as prize-crew under me in this ship,' said I, when the baby had done crying, and looking as I spoke at Miss Palmer: there was a little smile in her eyes, and I saw that she knew me. 'I merely say this in order that those among you who decide to remain in this vessel may know that they will be under the guardianship of a portion of the people whom Mr. Culpepper is good enough to call your brave rescuers.'

'I should prefer the schooner,' said Colonel Bray.

'And that is my choice,' exclaimed Mr. Culpepper.

'Ladies and gentlemen,' said I, 'I have to ask that those among you who wish to be transferred to the schooner will be good enough to immediately collect such articles as they may wish to take with them. Darkness will be upon us shortly, and time presses.'

Colonel Bray, Mr. Johnson, Mr. Culpepper, Mrs. Montague and family, rushed into their cabins. Mr. Solomons flung him-

self down upon a chair, and was immediately attacked by his wife.

‘Now, what do you mean to do, Jonas?’

‘I am very comfortable here, and I shall stop, my dear.’

‘Mind what you say! The pirates that’s been turned out of this ship aren’t the only ones on the sea!’

‘I don’t care about other pirates. All my goods are in this ship, and here I tthtop.’

‘Was there ever such a man! He thinks of his goods as if he hadn’t got a life to lose. Do you hear what I tell you, Jonas?’

Here Tapping, limping heavily from a wound in his foot, came stumping down the companion-steps like a wooden-legged man.

‘The boat has returned, sir, from taking the wounded to the schooner.’

‘Very well, Mr. Tapping. Arm the men, and get the prisoners on deck. They are to be transferred to the *Tigress* at once.’

‘Right, sir!’ and he went up the steps again. As I looked around, Miss Palmer came up to me with her hand extended.

‘Do not you remember me, Mr. Madison?’ she exclaimed.

‘Indeed I do, Miss Palmer,’ I answered, holding her hand. ‘I saw and knew you when you saw but did not know me.’

‘No, do not say that. I recognised you the moment you entered the cabin, though I was too much surprised to speak.’

‘Surely you did not recognise me when I had a handkerchief over my grimy face?’ I exclaimed, laughing.

‘Was *that* you!’ she answered, much astonished. ‘Why, it looked like a dying man! *You* are not wounded?’

‘Very slightly—nothing worth mentioning. Miss Palmer, you cannot imagine how proud and glad I am that the little *Tigress* should have been the instrument of saving you from a voyage to America, and God knows how long a detention there. But tell me now—for time presses—which vessel would you prefer to remain in?’

‘I would like to be guided by you, Mr. Madison,’ she replied.

‘As I am to take command here,’ said I, feeling that I blushed a little, but talking on pretty bravely, ‘you may guess what my wish would be. But I should not like to influence you. I may say, however, that as the *Tigress* will hold us in sight, and as the journey to Kingston will not occupy much time, you may believe that you will be as safe with me as with Captain Shelvocke.’

She turned to the couple who were arguing at the table.

‘Mrs. Solomons, do you intend to stop in the *Namur*!’ she asked.

‘Yes, yes, miss, we shall stop,’ responded Mr. Solomons.

‘Listen to the man! he thinks only of his goods!’ rattled out Mrs. Solomons. ‘Does he *know* what he means? Be pleased to tell him, mister, what he risks by stopping!’

‘He really risks nothing that I know of,’ I answered, seeing the importance of prevailing upon these people to stay where they were, as it would be out of the question that Miss

Palmer could stop unless some other lady remained also.

‘You hear him, my dear : now don’t bother me any more,’ remonstrated Solomons, shrugging his shoulders, and extending his hands, and looking very worried.

‘Mind, then !’ exclaimed Mrs. Solomons, ‘this is your doing. I have left it to you. It’s you as decides. If harm comes, it’ll be your fault, Jonas : so mind !’

And she bustled into Mrs. Montague’s cabin, where I heard her abuse her husband to that lady as a weak-minded old man.

‘As they have decided to remain, I too will take my chance with you,’ said Miss Palmer, addressing me with a smile. ‘I am sure I shall be as safe here as in the *Tigress*, and certainly more comfortable, as I do not suppose your schooner will have a cabin like this.’

‘No, indeed,’ I replied, overjoyed by the prospect of her company.

She must have remarked my delight, for she looked away with a little tremor of the eyelids—not a smile, and yet with more

significance in it than a smile could have held, which so confused me that to remedy my embarrassment I went the round of the berths, bidding their inmates make haste and join me on deck, and then quitted the cabin.

I was in great spirits ; my heels never felt lighter ; I would have foregone all my prize-money sooner than this meeting with Miss Palmer. And yet, what was she to me ? Worse still, what was I to her ? Could I be ass enough to suppose that she had ever given the young fellow she had danced with at Plymouth a single thought from the moment I had said good-bye to her down to this particular hour ? What on earth, then, was there in her arranging to stop on board the ship that was like to set me whistling for happiness as any schoolboy would ?

Here I knocked my hat against the top of the companion, and crushed it over my nose, and when I raised it I was on deck confronting the American privateersmen, who had been brought up from below, and stood in a group near the gangway, and their lovely counte-

nances speedily clapped a stopper on my romancing.

There were twelve of them, two coal-black Africans, a few mulattoes, and the rest white men ; and of all the rascally creatures I ever beheld, I think these were the worst. Tapping had taken the precaution to pinion their wrists behind them as they emerged one by one from the fore-hatch, and it was impossible to see their scowling, gleaming eyes wandering upon the weapons in our men's hands without applauding his discretion. The blacks and mulattoes were nearly naked ; the white men wore shirts ; they were all of them exceedingly powerful men, especially the negroes, upon whose naked flesh the muscles stood out as you may see them on the shoulders and haunches of straining cart-horses. They were handed over the side like carcases, and deposited in the boat, half of them aft and half forward, a number of armed seamen stood over them, and presently they were alongside the schooner.

By this time the passengers had arrived on deck, and I sent some men below to

bring up the parcels and cases which they desired to take with them to the *Tigress*. They appeared to realise their rescue here more completely than in the cabin. I saw Mr. Culpepper look around him with strong emotion expressed in his face ; Mr. Johnson grasped my hand and held it, without speaking ; indeed, by a hundred nice tokens which cannot be expressed in words, they all of them appeared deeply affected by the sudden and happy change that had been wrought in their condition.

Miss Palmer went to the rail and leaned upon it, watching the schooner. The sun was still above the sea, but he would vanish in another ten minutes ; the great and peaceful glory in the west, the calm soft blue of the sky overhead, the graceful shape of the schooner rolling gently on the swelling green of the water that was gradually transmuted into a sheet of flashing gold as it neared the sun, formed a scene that must have given a particular richness to the sense and relish of the liberty that had come to these people a short time ago, were prisoners on

their way to a bitter exile in an enemy's country.

‘Is that the vessel, mister, that fought this ship?’ asked Mrs. Solomons of me, pointing to the schooner.

‘Yes, that is she, madam,’ I replied, accepting the inquiry as a preface to something laudatory.

‘Well, when I looks at her,’ says she, ‘I don’t know but what Jonas is right after all. She’s but a little ship, mister, and I dare say rolls fearful.’

‘Ay, she rolls fearfully, Mrs. Solomons: you’d never be able to keep your footing in her. However, I’ll say nothing about the smallness of her cabins, and the heat of them, and the cockroaches, ma’am, for they cannot concern you now that you have been clever enough to decide on remaining in this large, roomy, cool, and beautifully-furnished ship,’ said I, determined to disgust out of her any lingering wish she might have to accompany the others—for, as I have said, if *she* went, Miss Palmer would have to go too.

She nodded cunningly, and I rather think she winked.

‘Ah,’ she whispered, ‘Mr. Solomons is no fool. He knows what’s good. Are you the captain of this vessel, sir?’

‘I shall have charge of her, as I think I informed you.’

‘Well, I’m pleased to hear it. You looks a good sailor. Lor’, to think of our being rescued from them savages, and me calling upon death this very day sooner than be carried off to Ameriky along with two thousands o’ pounds’ worth of goods belonging to Mr. Solomons, and which he was only saying to me just before your ship took to firing at us—“Rachel,” he says——’

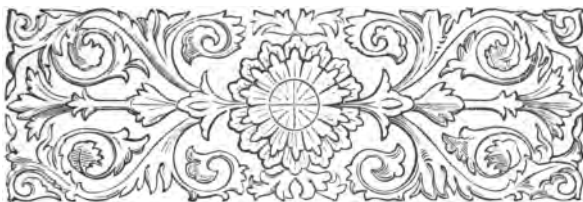
The interesting creature’s confidences were interrupted by a fellow in the main-top bawling out ‘From under!’ and I had just time to trundle her out of the road, before the port-mizzen topsail brace, the end of which had been accidentally let go, unrove itself and fell heavily in a heap where she had been standing. Uttering various exclamations of alarm, and fanning herself violently, my

porpoise-shaped beauty waddled or rolled to the companion, and disappeared in search of her Jonas.

Presently the cutter returned from the schooner, and the passengers entered her, shaking hands with me as they went over the side. The sun sank as they put off, and the darkness came rolling down upon us like a curtain out of the east. But by this time most of the refitting aloft was completed; the running-gear had been rove afresh, new fore and mizzen topsails bent, tackles got on to the injured standing rigging, and the decks so effectually cleared that, beyond sundry dark stains here and there and splashes upon the paint of the bulwarks, no relic of the dreadful carnage that had made a very shambles of the Indiaman was visible.

Once more the cutter returned, with orders from Shelvocke to me, to keep fifteen men and Parell, making sixteen, as a prize-crew, and to send the rest of the *Tigresses* back to the schooner. At the same time some written instructions from Shelvocke respecting day and night signals, etc., were placed in my

hand. The men were mustered, a prize-crew singled out, and the remainder repaired on board the *Tigress*, who fired a gun as a signal for us to brace round the main-yards ; and in a few minutes the ship was gliding slowly through the water, with the dark shadow of the schooner blotting out the stars to windward, and a thin, greenish, fiery wake trailing slowly away under our taffrail into the dark waters of the east.



CHAPTER IV.

MY PASSENGERS.



HE night came down very dark but clear, and the sky was so crowded with stars that scores of them were blotted out by the meteors as they broke and vanished in clouds of silver dust. The men had come from aloft, and were in the forecastle, swinging their hammocks and taking a spell of rest after the heavy exertions of the day ; the ship was under three topsails, courses, and fore-and-aft canvas, in deep shadow, save where a bright light burning in the galley threw a glare across the deck—a yellow beam that floated upon the darkness like an elongated *ignis fatuus*—and threw up a short length of the rusty links of

This information was no doubt accurate, and it explained away one source of puzzlement that had pretty considerably bothered me since I had found time to look around ; I mean the total disappearance of everybody barring the passengers, who were in the ship before she was taken by the privateer.

‘Very well, Parell ; keep a look-out whilst I go below and get something to eat. Send Ransom aft, and be careful to keep the schooner’s light well in view ;’ and after taking a peep at the compass I made my way into the cabin.

The lamps had been lighted some time before, and the cabin looked amazingly brilliant with its tall sparkling mirrors, and the gleaming marble-coloured mizzen-mast, and the shimmer of the lights in the rich, dark panelling. The table was still littered with the ham, plates, decanters and biscuits ; but the disorder of these homely articles did not impair the drawing-room elegance and charming air of refinement that characterised this richly-cushioned, carpeted, and delicately-coloured interior. Miss Palmer, who had

left the deck shortly after dusk, was seated in a low arm-chair, with her hands folded upon her lap, and apparently lost in thought. Opposite her, in another chair, with his feet cocked up, lay Mr. Solomons, fast asleep, and snoring with a noise like a straining timber. Mrs. Solomons was in her berth, and I could hear her talking to herself as she shambled about.

Miss Palmer looked heartily pleased to see me. Her face brightened up, and she warmed quickly and gracefully into life out of her reverie like a flower under the rising sun. (Rather poetical, this, for a nautical man ; but I never can think of her without drifting into garden fancies.)

‘ I am afraid you will find the rest of the voyage dull, now that no society is left you but——’ and I motioned with my head to old Jonas.

‘ Dull, Mr. Madison ? Do you imagine I am dull because you find me sitting here with my hands before me ? Were you to ask me how I feel, I should not be able to tell you. I can hardly believe that I am not dreaming.

Last night I nearly cried my eyes out in thinking of my father. I remember telling you he was ill, and that I was going to Jamaica in the hope of inducing him to return with me. When I thought of my being forced away into another part of the world, at a time when our voyage was near its close, and that months must pass before he and I could meet—if ever we met in this world again—and that he might die without knowing what had become of me—was it not enough to break my heart, Mr. Madison? And now that I am with friends again, and a dreadful time—oh, how dreadful a time!—past, and once more on my way to my dear father—can you suppose me dull? Surely that is like charging me with cruel ingratitude: though how grateful I am, to God first for His merciful providence in bringing you to our ship, and to you next, and your brave men, for your noble and heroic struggle, only my own heart knows—no words could express my thankfulness.'

She rose from her chair with her eyes swimming, and grasped my hand with both

hers and held it, unconsciously caressing it in the plenitude of her gratitude and emotion. The touch of her hands set my heart beating so furiously, that for the life of me I could not immediately have spoken to her. Fortunately she was as much moved as I, though in a different way, and did not (as I believe) observe how consumedly upset I was.

‘You told me you had been slightly wounded,’ said she presently, resuming her seat. ‘I hope only slightly, and that you are quite well again?’

‘A little tap on the pate—just here, Miss Palmer,’ I answered, touching the top of my head. ‘Not enough to let out my foolishness, nor to admit some of the intellect I stand in need of. Have you had anything to eat to-day?’ said I, struck by an idea.

‘Nothing since breakfast—though I really should not have known we had not dined but for your question,’ she answered, smiling. ‘We were all too miserable to eat.’

I looked at the ham on the table.

‘Oh!’ she exclaimed, following my glance,

‘the odious man in a red cap who took command here when our captain was carried away, called for those things, and was beginning his meal, when somebody came down to say that a sail was in sight—your schooner, as it afterwards proved. He jumped up, and left those things as you see them. Oh, Mr. Madison, what a horrid—horrid—*horrid* creature he was!’ she added with a strong shudder, and putting an almost vicious energy into the last ‘horrid;’ ‘so rude, so hideous, so gross!’

Here Mr. Solomons, as if sympathising with her language, gasped loudly in his sleep, wheezed, and gargled through his nose, ‘Not them goods, thir! they’re mine: two thousand pounds worth. Rachel was with me when——’ *snore.*

‘Happy old man that!’ said I. ‘The one beautiful thing about old age is its quality of indifference. Here, Ransom!’ I sung out, in so loud a voice that old Solomons woke up in a fright, and stared at me with his eyes rounded like an owl’s; and at the same moment Mrs. Solomons came bundling out

of her cabin: 'get the cloth laid here, my lad. I'll show you how to place the knives and forks. Yonder's the pantry—overhaul it, and make the best show you can, and bear a hand.'

The youngster whom I had noticed flitting at the head of the companion-ladder came trotting below, and went to work with more adroitness than I had expected. It is true he set the glasses upside down, and the plates in the middle of the table, and the cold meats which he found in the pantry he lumped together like a dozen colliers which had parted their cables and gone adrift in a body; but Miss Palmer and I soon effected such a distribution of the crockery as made the table very hospitable and glittering, and I presently had the happiness of seeing my three passengers making a good supper.

'Now, Rachel,' exclaimed Solomons, pegging away at a cold fowl, and talking with his mouth full, 'isn't this comfort? What more would you have? Did you want to box me up in the little wooden cabin of a butter-rigged schooner?'

‘Not butter-rigged, Mr. Solomons,’ said I.

‘Well, well,’ he said with a shrug, ‘then she *shan’t* be butter-rigged ; but you won’t pretend that she has such a cabin as this, sir ?’

‘I don’t say I wasn’t a little hasty, Jonas,’ answered his wife, whose enormous person, as she sat at the table, completely overhung her plate, and obliged her to look at her fork every time she lifted it to know what she was eating. ‘Mister, might I trouble you for a bit of that tongue ?’

‘Miss Palmer,’ said I, holding up a bottle of champagne which Ransom had discovered in the pantry along with various other bottles of wines and spirits, including two of Jamaica rum, all which he had very faithfully and honourably put upon the table, where they stood in a lump like a wine-merchant’s ‘order’ ready for delivery, ‘when I last had the happiness of drinking champagne with you, I little thought that our next meeting would be on the high seas, and amid the thunder of a sterner kind of cannon than those which Sir William Tempest fired in honour of his son. Will you let me fill your

glass? Such a triumph as ours over the Yankees deserves to be drunk in an elegant wine.'

She smiled with a pretty colour in her face that made her eyes sparkle ; but the poetry of drinking wine in champagne with this sweet girl was balked by Solomons calling for the bottle. I verily believe the old fool thought I had proposed a toast. The result was, we all drank to one another, and I was nearly convulsed by the bow and the smirk Mrs. Solomons bestowed on me. A bow did I call it? It was rather the compression of a balloon, or like standing a feather-bed on end and squeezing down the top of it. There was no inclination forward: it was merely a lowering of the head, and a surprising increase of the rotundity of the body ; and her very gown shone under the tightening effect of her laborious amiability.

'I see that you have met Miss Palmer before, mister,' said Solomons. Both he and his wife evidently thought the 'mister' as polite a form of accost as the strictest good-breeding required.

‘Yes, Mr. Solomons, I have had that pleasure,’ I replied, glancing at Miss Palmer, and receiving a smile from her.

‘I met Mr. Madison at Plymouth a few days before the *Namur* sailed, Mr. Solomons,’ said Miss Palmer. Her voice was so full of music, that it was a greater treat to hear her speak than to listen to a good singer. ‘It was but a short acquaintance, Mr. Madison.’

‘Acquaintances are always short when they’re first made, my dear,’ said Mrs. Solomons, with an encouraging nod. ‘But I dare say, mister, you was very surprised when you saw her here, wasn’t you?’

‘Sailors soon lose the faculty of surprise,’ I replied coldly, not relishing the direction the conversation was taking in her hands. ‘I have not yet looked into the berths, Miss Palmer; can you tell me if our shot have done much damage?’

‘Damage!’ cried Solomons; ‘Lord bless your heart, I should say there’s not less than twelve pounds worth of windies broken.’

‘Several windows are broken, Mr. Madison,’ said Miss Palmer, keeping her face with admirable breeding. ‘The window in my cabin was broken by one of the first shots the *Tigress* fired, and a whole shower of glass fell over me.’

‘I was sitting,’ said Mrs. Solomons, in a well-soaped, confidential voice, and nodding her head at every other word until her chins quivered over her collar like jellies to the tread of dancers, ‘talkin’ to Mr. Solomons, and he was calculating how much it would cost him to get us out of prison after we was in Ameriky, when a cannon-ball hit the back of the ship just against the wall where my cheer was. The blow was that violent it throwed me on to the floor, and when I begged and prayed of Mr. Solomons to help me up, where do you think he was, mister?’

‘I cannot guess.’

‘Why, in bed, sir; with the counterpane pulled over his head, and the toes of his boots sticking up at the other end.’

‘A very good place to be in,’ said I, looking at Solomons, who was picking the

leg of a fowl with a dogged face. 'I understand from one of my men, Miss Palmer, that the privateersman carried off three of the passengers. Why was that?'

'I cannot imagine Mr. Madison. The American captain came into this cabin with a number of men, and ordered Captain Salmon' (the skipper of the *Namur*) 'to produce his passengers. We were desired to stand up in a row, as though we were felons,' she said, with her face flushing with the memory of the indignity, 'and were then asked our names.'

'True; every word of it, mister,' interrupted Mrs. Solomons; 'and Mr. Solomons was for calling himself Levi.'

'And wasn't I right to try to cheat 'em?' shouted Solomons. 'Rachel, don't quote me any more, for God's sake. I'm sick of hearing you.'

'After we had given our names,' continued Miss Palmer, 'the American captain ordered Captain Salmon and three of the passengers—one of them Sir Sampson Jardine, a judge, the other two rich plantation-owners—

to go on deck. They did not return, and we saw no more of them. We were afterwards told they had been sent to the privateer.'

'Did not the *Namur* make one of a convoy when she left England?' I asked.

'Yes; but we met with a heavy gale of wind that dispersed the other vessels; and we had been alone four days when the privateer attacked us.'

These answers put the story before me intelligibly; and I further learnt from Mr. Solomons that the freight of the *Namur* consisted of a general cargo; but he could not tell me the nature of it, unless I except two thousand pounds worth of house-furniture belonging to Solomons. The ship's papers had either been carried off or destroyed; for I afterwards searched high and low for them, but without success.

Supper being despatched, I looked into the cabin that had been occupied by Captain Salmon; and finding a cot swinging in it and several other conveniences, I ordered Ransom to prepare it for me. I also got

Miss Palmer to shift her quarters into a cabin which the *Tigress's* shot had left untouched, and then went on deck to settle the watches.

The starlight had brightened somewhat, and the night was clearer than it had been when I went below. The wind was exceedingly soft and refreshing, and the sea quiet, black, and gleaming; the dew kept the decks cool like constant showers of rain; and the slow passage of the ship through the sea was appreciable to the ear alone of all the senses by the soft purring and creaming of the water around her stem. Ahead of us, broad on the starboard-bow, loomed the shadow of the schooner, the bright light on whose stern baffled every effort of the eye to determine her outline. That her people were watching us like cats, I knew by the regularity of the distance from us they maintained. And indeed, when I considered the value of the *Namur*, and the slenderness of her crew, I was anxious enough, as you may believe, that the *Tigress* should keep us well under her

I told Parell to pipe the men aft ; thirteen grouped themselves on the quarter-deck, leaving one at the wheel and Ransom in the cabin. I counted and divided them, making seven in Parell's and eight in my watch. I then sent the starboard watch below ; and lighting a pipe—the first bit of tobacco I had tasted that day—I planted myself on a gun-carriage to enjoy a quiet smoke.

It was a true remark of mine to Mrs. Solomons that a man who goes to sea as a sailor soon loses the power of being surprised. Indeed, the whole life of a sailor is a chance, and the unexpected is the only thing he can safely reckon on. Consequently, my transfer from the *Tigress* to the temporary command of this large West Indiaman did not in the least astonish me. Her spacious decks, her lofty masts, the numerous points of equipment which distinguish a full-rigged ship from a topsail schooner, had grown familiar to me, I may say, almost as soon as I had found myself amidst them ; and had I sailed in the *Namur* from England I could not have surveyed her with an eye more

totally unimpressed by the novelty of my surroundings.

But my professional incapacity of surprise ceased with the ship. My astonishment began when I thought of Miss Palmer. It was certainly amazing to find myself aboard the ship she had taken her passage in, commanding that ship, intimately associated with her who had occupied much of my thoughts, in the happy position of having been one of the instruments of the rescue of a girl who had grappled my admiration—to say no more—with hooks of steel, from the horror of a prolonged exile from her father and her home.

The silence, broken only by the creaming of froth forward ; the imponderable lower darkness, over whose topmost heights the starry heavens were sparkling in wide-spread glory of silver fires ; the hush upon the faintly breathing bosom of the deep, in whose darkling surface a faint throbbing of phosphorescent radiance mingled with the white crystalline reflection of the greater stars ; the shadowy decks with here and there the figure

of a man standing still as a figure of bronze, and the faint haze of a lantern slung on the fore-stay, throwing up the coal-black pillar of the gigantic foremast—these were influences to subdue me into a pensive mood ; and my thoughts strayed from Madeline Palmer to the events of the hours which were passing away, and my heart melted in gratitude to my heavenly Father for the merciful protection He had vouchsafed me throughout the fierce and murderous struggle of the afternoon.

A footstep caused me to look around.

‘ Is not that Miss Palmer ? ’

‘ Yes, Mr. Madison ; surely it is not so dark but that I am to be distinguished from Mrs. Solomons ? ’

‘ Is she on deck ? ’ I asked, rising and gazing about me.

‘ No ; but her husband will be here in a minute. Pray do not put down your pipe. ’

‘ Shall I fetch you a chair, or will you walk ? ’

‘ I would rather walk. ’

In spite of the haze thrown upon the air

from the lamps under the cabin skylights, the outlines of our figures only were visible. The occasional slight roll of the ship gave me an excuse to offer her my arm, and she took it.

‘This has been a rare day of surprises, Miss Palmer,’ said I. ‘It is strange that of all the convoy dispersed by the gale, the *Namur* should have been the only one reserved for the *Tigress* to overhaul, and not a little astonishing that you and I should meet again under conditions so extremely different from what any prophet with the least regard for his reputation would have dared to predict. But the most amazing part of it all to me is, that this very morning you were so incessantly in my thoughts that positively Captain Shelvocke noticed my abstraction, and twitted me on it. Considering that your ship must have been within a few leagues of us at that time, one ought to be superstitious enough to suppose that there is more in this than mere common sense can perceive.’

This very simple and candid speech ought perhaps to have embarrassed her; had she

shown any embarrassment I should probably have seen how very simple and candid it was; instead, she laughed pleasantly, and answered:

‘You have a wonderful memory, Mr. Madison, considering you are a sailor.’

‘At all events I don’t forget Lady Tempest’s ball,’ I answered; ‘and if we were aboard the *Tigress* I could prove the sincerity of my memory by showing you the flower you gave me.’

‘Yes, I remember,’ said she. ‘The fireworks were very pretty, and the night was even finer than this, for there was a moon, was there not? How peaceful and beautiful those heavens seem!’ she exclaimed, raising her face that looked shadowy and vague as some lovely spirit’s, with the starlight gleaming in her soft large eyes: ‘what a tranquil close to such a day as we have gone through! I should like to have seen Captain Shelvocke—do you remember pointing him out to me at the ball you have spoken of? He ought to know how grateful I am—how grateful we all are to him and his brave men. But I shall

doubtless meet him at Kingston, where my father will be able to add his thanks to mine.'

And then she talked of her father, and her anxiety about his health, and the eagerness with which she looked forward to their meeting. Indeed, the love she bore her father was delightful to hear her talking about, and I listened to her voice as a man listens to a nightingale. She conversed with the same cordial well-bred candour that had fascinated me when we first met, and it was the pleasanter to me to hearken to because it implied the best compliment a girl can pay a man. Yes, I own I am never better pleased than when a well-bred woman bestows her home feelings upon me. Let her favour Jones or Jenkins with her festive hopes and memories, and chatter to them of dresses, lovers, balls, and Italian singers; she charms me most when she talks of baby's first tooth, her boy's cleverness—when in short she takes me into the nursery, ay, and into the kitchen, my boy, of her life; passing over the drawing-room, where those fine fel-

lows, Jones and Jenkins, sit in polished boots and burnished waistcoats.

My sweet companion gave me a description of the red-capped Yankee privateersman; how he would come into the cabin, fling himself into a chair with his cap on, and leaning his long arms over the back of it, while his legs stuck out like a pair of compasses, the points of which were riveted in a couple of immense rusty boots, heap—through his nose, and with his mouth full of tobacco—every possible abuse that could be coined by an American ruffian upon the British people: how, by way of giving emphasis to his contempt for the British people, he would pull out a pistol and point it at those male passengers whom he particularly addressed: how on one occasion he invited a number of blacks to breakfast, and made the ladies take their arms to the table, in order to show, as he said, what an American citizen's notions of liberty were. Her voice quivered as she told me these things; and that grosser affronts had been offered her than she knew how to tell me I was sure by her suddenly

withdrawing her trembling hand from my arm, and burying her face, leaving me swelling with helpless indignation, and passionately deploring that it had not been my hand that struck Master Red-cap down.

However, she rallied presently, as I did when I reflected that the scoundrel *was* dead, and that of his fiendish crew only a handful were preserved for the gallows ; and, after I had soothed her a bit, she put her arm again into mine, and held as though she clung to me—an unconscious action on her part, though it moved me strangely : and in a few minutes we were once more talking quietly on cheerful matters, pausing now and then to watch some bright meteor flash over our mast-heads, or the quivering of the yellow light thrown by the lantern on the schooner's stern into the visionary darkness of the water under her, or the passage of the stars gracefully sailing through the faint tracery of the rigging as the shadowed and silent ship leaned gently with the swell.

There is no place in the world where a charming girl's society is more enjoyable

than on the deck of a vessel on a quiet, starlight night, when there is just wind enough to keep the sails asleep, and when the *shaling* of the water, broken by the pushing stem, runs like a tune through your whispers and the silences between, and when every sound seems muffled by the darkness—the jar of the rudder, the murmur of men talking forward, the creak of a block high up in the gloom.

Poets may sing of love-making in sylvan scenes, of Delia listening to Strephon amid the twinkling shadows of leaves, of Chloe hearkening to Damon blowing his pipe while lambkins skip in the distance and Zephyr wantons o'er the enamelled mead ; by all means let Strephon enjoy himself *sub tegmine fagi*, and let the lambkins shake a foot to Damon's oaten pipe ; but if Delia and Chloe want to taste a bliss in flirtation beyond all that the poets have told, let them choose for a theatre a roomy ship's deck, a star-spangled night, a soft tropical air sweetened to every sense by refreshful showers of dew falling with every melodious flap of the

alabaster-like sails, and a surrounding space of mighty waters reaching down to the further heavens, and yielding out of their vast and gloomy distances a high and magical colouring to the thoughts.

Do not I speak from experience? for a whole blissful hour Madeline Palmer and I patrolled the spacious quarter-deck of the *Namur*, and with but one brief interruption from Mr. Solomons, who, with an immense cheroot in his mouth, asked me if I could tell him how fast we were going. I looked over the side and gave a guess at the speed, whereupon he got upon the aftermost skylight, and pillowing his head upon his arm, lay on his back and troubled us no more.

At last Miss Palmer said she must wish me good-night now; it was nearly ten o'clock; she had much enjoyed her walk and conversation.

‘Indeed I am afraid, Mr. Madison, I have tired you with my incessant chatter.’

‘Indeed you haven’t, and I hope you don’t believe you have. Your society gives me so much happiness that I should only make a

fool of myself if I attempted to express my gratitude. You cannot imagine what a delightful break your company is to a poor sailor whose horizon has for weeks been sea and sky.'

'I believe you, Mr. Madison, as you must believe me,' she exclaimed, pausing in the soft radiance that streamed through the open skylight, whereby I beheld her eyes fixed earnestly on me, and her sweet face very pensive and thoughtful. 'Unmeaning compliments would be a cruel pastime after our experiences this day. When I think of what your presence in this ship means, my escape from sufferings I dare not dwell upon, I can only wonder that my full heart suffers me to speak at all.'

'Ay, but you mustn't let the past trouble you. If I chose, I could make myself as sad as the ghost of a murdered man, by reflecting upon the number of brave, hearty, kindly shipmates whom the rascally buccaneers have sent to their account this day ; of my plucky messmate, the second mate of the *Tigress*, tossing, with a dangerous wound in him, in the close

atmosphere of the schooner's little cabin ; of the narrow escape I have had from sounding these dark and melancholy depths, on whose surface you and I are exchanging our fancies. But surely I am wiser in preferring to dwell upon the happiness that has grown out of to-day's thunder—the happiness, I mean, of having helped to rescue you from the Yankees, and of passing a few days, at least, in your society.'

'One cannot forget the past at will,' said she, shaking her head ; 'and I have not your power of fixing my attention on things I ought to think of.'

However, she smiled as she said this ; and then, holding out her hand, bade me good-night.

'God bless her !' thought I, watching her go down the companion-steps ; and when her bronze-coloured hair caught the light as she descended, it sparkled as though she shook a shower of gold-dust out of it. 'A charming girl, indeed ! a frank, womanly, affectionate lady !'

Here I went on tiptoe to the foremost sky-

light, and peered into it to see her as she passed along the cabin. She stopped at the table to fill a glass from a jug of water on one of the swinging trays. The shawl she had over her shoulders dropped off as she stretched forth her hand to take the jug, and her wide sleeve slipped down below her elbow and exposed her beautifully moulded arm that was as white as ivory, and gleamed like bridal silk in the beams of the lamp that hung to the right of her. Not being a linen-draper, I could not tell you what material her dress was made of. It was white, and *bolted* with black velvet, and fitted her like a glove ; and a narrow, black, silver-mounted belt, to which her sandal-wood fan was hitched, marked the circumference of her waist with lovely precision against the swell of her bosom, as she leaned across the table as flexibly as a sportive panther crouching for a bound.

Suddenly she looked up, and saw me before I could dodge my head. It was very annoying to be caught watching her.

‘I was just going to advise you to put a dash of sherry into that water, in case it

shouldn't have been filtered,' said I, keeping the shadow of the skylight on my face that she might not witness my confusion.

'The water is very clear,' she answered, looking into the jug, and, for my satisfaction, poured out a glassful, and held the glass up to the light for me to see ; and as she stood with her face upturned, and her hair gleaming on her forehead, and her lifted hand poising the sparkling glass to the lamp, and giving her figure the sweetest posture it could have taken, methought a fairer picture was never offered to mortal eyes than that which this skylight framed.

She bowed and moved away, and to comfort myself for her loss I pulled out my pipe and lighted it.

'I don't know if you are aware, Mr. Solomons,' said I, going to the after-skylight, where the little man lay as quiet as a suit of clothes, 'that every time you suck your cigar the reflection of the glowing point sparkles in your face as though it overhung a pool of water: strong proof that the dew falls heavily;' and I scooped along the top of the skylight

with my hand, and flung a cupful of water off it on to the deck.

‘I’m obliged to you for the hint, thir,’ he answered, getting up. ‘I’ve been wondering what made my small clothes feel so heavy on my legs.’

‘Let me advise you to change them—pray stand in this light for one moment; ha! I thought as much: the dew has turned your waistcoat into brown paper.’

‘Whoever would have thought it so damp!’ he exclaimed, smearing himself down with both hands. ‘Is my wife on deck, mister?’

‘No; she has been below all the evening.’

He went to the companion and stood staring around at the dark sea.

‘There is no danger of any kind about, is there, thir? nothing, I mean, to prevent me from going to bed properly?’ said he.

‘Nothing more than you see,’ I answered.

‘I haven’t worn a nightcap for two nights,’ said he, ‘and sleeping in my clothes always makes me feel as if I was a man in possession.’

‘That must be rather a queer thing to feel like,’ I observed.

‘Well, it isn’t so much the clothes being on you, as their obliging you to lie awake and listen, and to think every sound that strikes your ear to be some one moving goods. However, I shall sleep comfortable to-night, thank God, and so I wish you *bong swore*, mister.’

He faded down the ladder, creeping with great caution, and clinging fast to the hand-rail, and I was left in lonely possession of the deck.

I was no sooner alone than an unaccountable depression fell upon my spirits. Whether it was due to the blow I had received on the top of my head, or to the events of the day which took advantage of my solitude to crowd upon my memory, and to flash upon my mind’s eye the dreadful picture of carnage these decks had exhibited after the fight, I know not ; but I do remember that a most heavy sense of foreboding weighed in me, a nervous apprehension of coming evil, that my utmost resolution was unequal to combat.

I went aft to the man at the wheel and spoke to him ; but I had better remained alone, for after exchanging a few words, the poor fellow began to speak of our action with the Yankee privateersman, and then told me that his brother—whom he had sailed with, voyage after voyage, for fifteen years, during which time they had always managed to be in the same watch, and even to sling their hammocks alongside of each other—had been run through by one of the men who had boarded the *Tigress*, in the waist, and instantly killed. His head drooped over the spokes of the wheel which he clutched, as in rough and broken tones he told me of the affection that subsisted between them, how neither of them had married, that their wages might be wholly appropriated to the support of their mother, and I saw the tears glance from his eyes past the binnacle-lamp as he muttered that he did not know how he should be able to break the news to the poor old woman, and that it was a pity the Lord had not taken him instead of Joe, who was ten times the better man, 'the finest sailor, your honour,

in the whole world, every finger a fish-hook, his courage like a lion's, and his heart as soft as a girl's.'

I had no consolation to offer him ; indeed I was only fit to make him more miserable ; so I left him and went to the side and hung over it gloomily, watching the schooner and heartily wishing it were an hour earlier that I might persuade Madeline Palmer to come on deck again and cheer me up with her company.

All this time there was a light breeze gently blowing on the quarter, and our progress was marked by the slow passage of little eddies whose presence in the deep black water was denoted by the phosphorus that circled in them. Indeed, but for these tiny whirlpools and the soft moan of foam at the bows of the ship, I should not have guessed that we were moving, so imperceptible was the motion of the dark hull and so deep the silence aloft.

There is nothing in the world that so heightens the mood with which you survey it as the sea, be your mood what it will. Had

I been light-hearted, I should have doubtless beheld in the spacious fields of ebony waters gleaming down to the stars upon the horizon, a symbol to quicken my pulse with its magnificent suggestion of liberty ; I should have thought of the fretful and feverish worries of life ashore, the baiting of man by his fellow-man, the struggles of poverty, the pains and fears of wealth, the unhallowed romance of

‘ Loose life, unruly passions and diseases pale ;’

and contrasted some such a vision of populous human existence with the broad and majestic amphitheatre upon whose dark liquid floor our vessel hung, watched by a sky of silver stars and fanned by an air fresh from heaven’s own nostrils.

But my mood now found the deep a heavy shadow, haunted by corpses, a ‘thrilling region’ that deepened fancy until I gazed spell-bound upon the visionary space, dreaming the dreams which out of its prodigal sympathy it yielded to my imagination. All the men who had been stricken down this day

swarmed in the void like the ghosts in Glover's ballad; and my material eye—sharpened no doubt into keen perception of fantasies by the loss of blood, and by the whack that had given my senses a little interval of rest—did, and I will swear it, behold their misty shapes visibly lined under the black surface whose distance from the bulwark rail—for there was no starlight in the sea alongside—would have been an unguessable thing but for the blue fires creeping past.

'Pish!' I cried, giving my cheek a slap in pure vexation of my maudlin mood, whereby I dislodged a shower of red sparks from the bowl of my pipe; 'wake up, thou mutton-headed dreamer!' and I was going to take my own advice and wake up, when lo! the hand I had raised to remove the pipe from my lips stiffened and remained forked up as though blasted by a flash of lightning. I felt my eyes protrude from their sockets, I held my breath, and a clammy dew gathered upon the skin of my forehead. 'What *is* that?' I muttered. An outline of pale blue smoke—

like a small hill of illuminated foam—passed swiftly through the water towards the bow of the ship; my startled eye shaped it into the likeness of a human figure — another and another sped after it—they looked like a flight of spectres: and the puffs of blue vapour that marked their passage through the pitchy water were like the fires which kindle in your eyes when you close them after looking at a bright light. Presently, and about a ship's length ahead, the sea flashed up in foam that was radiant with the magical colouring of the phosphorus. One would have said a water-spout was forming, or that a dying whale was lashing the sea in its agony. In a moment it was abreast of me; I looked at the luminous disturbance—there was a rush of blood to my head that was like to choke me. I shrieked out, and springing backwards in an agony of horror, my foot struck against the fake of a rope, and over I went, fetching the deck a rousing thump with the back of my head.

‘Hi, help here!’ I heard the fellow at the wheel sing out; ‘the chief officer’s swounded!’

Some men came tumbling aft ; but before they reached me I had made shift to gain my feet, though I trembled from head to foot, and the blood tingled in my extremities with the sensation a man feels when restored from drowning.

‘Get me some water, one of you : thanks ! there—that has set me up again.’

I wiped a trickling line of perspiration from my forehead ; but when I brought the handkerchief away, there was a deep stain of blood upon it.

‘Oh, confound this wound ! Here—pour the contents of that pannikin over this handkerchief.’ I threw down my cap, placed the soaked handkerchief on the wound on my head, and walked to the skylight where I seated myself, feeling uncommonly feeble and bewildered. The men were moving forward, speaking in low tones one to another, when I called to them. They drew near again.

‘Were any of you looking over the side just now ?’

‘I was,’ answered one of them, and another replied that he was too.

‘What did you see?’ I asked, bringing out the words with difficulty; for I was fool enough to be agitated by a misgiving that my eyes alone had witnessed the sight that affrighted me, and I feared their answer. I could see that the men were as much surprised by the question as by the voice in which I put it. One of them replied: ‘Do you mean the sharks, sir?’

‘Sharks!—were they sharks?’ I shouted.

‘I saw a queer sort o’ scrimmage betwixt three or four large sharks, sir, as if they was wrestling for some kind of food they’d come across, if that’s what you mean, sir,’ said the man.’

‘Sharks!’ I muttered, passing my hand across my eyes, as though by some such gesture I sought to cleanse my brain of the fog that thickened it, ‘why, when I come to consider, I suppose they *must* have been sharks. Ah, I see now! get me another drink of water, will you? What a sight to flash before a man on a sudden—illuminated by the horrible light churned up by the monsters! God have mercy!

people have been driven mad by smaller things !

I took a long pull at the cool water that had been brought to me.

‘Men, I was standing yonder—looking over the rail there, just abaft that shattered gun-port, and there shone amid the gloom ahead, whither I had noticed some shapes of fire dashing at full speed—sharks, of course,—a big circle of lashed waters, as big as this quarter-deck, men——’

‘That would be about it, sir,’ interrupted the fellow who had answered my first question.

‘I was thinking of our poor shipmates whom the bloody buccaneers sent to their account this day, and—as heaven is my witness—I saw a crowd of their bodies in the centre of this foaming circle, which, as you know—you, Jackson, who saw it—was all on fire, and gleaming like moonlight streaming through blue glass—wasn’t it ?’

‘Yes, yes ; that’s right, sir.’

‘And they held up, ay, so as to hoist two-thirds of him out of the water, the figure—

of whom, think you?—the figure of your second mate, Mr. Silas Chestree. Yes, by heaven! men, they held him as though they would drive me mad with the dreadful sight, and his head wagged and his arms waved, and there he was, swaying in the arms of the dead bodies around him. I saw him as plainly as I do the outline of that topsail-yard there against the stars!

The men looked first at me and then at one another, as though (small blame to them) they believed me clean daft. Suddenly the fellow named Jackson hooked the quid out of his cheek with his forefinger, flung it into his cap, and exclaimed with great emphasis :

‘I understand it now, sir, though I’m blowed if I wasn’t pretty well scared myself when I first see it. Wot we saw was sharks.’

‘Yes, I know that—I admit that!’ I cried impatiently. ‘But what *I* saw was Mr. Chestree.’

‘Wot *you* saw, sir,’ continued the fellow, deferentially but firmly, ‘was a dead body newly hove overboard from the schooner,

and we passed just in time to see a swarm o' sharks, that had been collected by the scent, a-fighting over it.'

A light broke in upon my brain.

'Jump forward one of you, and fire a musket over the bows.'

This was one of the preconcerted signals to be used by either vessel wanting to speak the other, and down in Shelvocke's written instructions to me. The musket flashed, and a small sharp report rattled across the water. Presently the schooner loomed near, proving that she had shortened sail, and we forged abreast of her.

I had acted impulsively and without rational excuse to signal her, but a feverish curiosity had mastered every consideration. Yet now that she was abreast of us I felt ashamed of myself, and was at a loss to know how to make my action appear reasonable.

'Ship ahoy!' shouted the familiar voice of Shelvocke.

'Hallo, sir!'

'Why have you fired a musket?'

‘To report that all’s well aboard of us,’ I blurted out, taking the first idea that came, ‘and to ask how it is with you.’

‘Is *that* ALL?’ he cried gruffly; and I could figure the sea-blessings invoked on my head by the watch on deck, who had been turned up to shorten sail.

‘Did you fling a body overboard just now, captain?’ I called, determined to satisfy my curiosity before the schooner forged ahead.

‘Yes, Mr. Madison; and sorry enough I am to have to tell you,’ answered Shelvocke, in a softened voice. ‘Poor Chestree died this evening, and we dared not keep the body through the night.’

‘Did you throw him overboard as he was, sir?’

‘Eh—what do you say?’

I repeated the question.

‘Certainly not,’ he answered indignantly. ‘He had no hammock, as you know, so he was stitched up in a pair of his sheets and launched. But this is worse than idling, sir! Do you mean to tell me you fired that musket merely to ask these questions?’

‘Just listen a moment, captain,’ I answered. ‘We passed his body just now, worried by half a-dozen sharks. The weight must have slipped from his feet, and the infernal fish had stripped him naked. God help me! when I saw him, I believed I was mad, and I fired that musket in order that your replies might assure me I still had my senses.’

I could hear him talking to some one alongside of him—probably Tapping: the two vessels were indeed not a biscuit’s throw from each other, and the wind blew from the schooner. I knew this information would shock him, as he was always jealous of the honour due to his officers; and I was sure that nothing but the excessive closeness of the cabin, and the heat of the temperature on deck, could have induced him to sanction a hurried and uncere- monious burial of poor Chestree’s remains.

Presently he called out :

‘I am much grieved, but it cannot be rectified. The men are tired, and the ’tween-decks full of wounded. The shot, I fear, was hastily made fast; but our hearts are with the dead, and God knows there is no man of the

Tigress's crew who would willingly do dishonour to the body of our brave and regretted shipmate.'

He waited to hear if I had anything more to say, and finding me silent, ordered sail to be made, and resumed his former station ahead.

'Chestree dead!' thought I. 'Alas! alas! what a day this has been!' Yet, sharp as was the pang caused me by the news, it yielded a feeling of relief too; for I knew, at least, that my eyes had not deceived me; that the ghastly and ghostly sight that had slid past was no phantasm of the brain; and I drew the same sort of comfort from the discovery that Dr. Johnson may be supposed to have derived from the manufacture of Greek and Latin verses in bed to satisfy himself that his intellect was still sound.



CHAPTER V.

JONATHAN AGAIN.

BEFORE my watch terminated, my nerves had recovered something of their old tone, and a four hours' deep sleep completed the cure. Parell aroused me, and I presently followed him on deck. I peered about for some moments before I caught sight of the schooner's light ; indeed, this was the proverbial black hour of the night, the stars languishing : it was like staring into the bottom of a coal-pit to look over the ship's side. There was a steady breeze, but unhappily it was blowing the wrong way, having veered dead ahead during my watch below, and the *Namur* was slightly heeling under it with her yards

braced hard up against the lee-rigging, and steering three points south of the course given me by Shelvocke.

The profound darkness was not very comfortable, and I was glad enough, on casting my eyes over the quarter, to behold the sky taking that indescribable sallow, slate-coloured hue which a tropical sunrise casts before it. I have always thought the aspect of the sea just before the sun rises the most melancholy sight in the world. The universal cold grey, the stony, chilly ash-colour of the dawn reflected in the uneasy deep, fills the eye with a picture of desolation. On shore a hundred cheerful signs herald the breaking day : the twittering of birds, the blue smoke rising from the cottage-chimney, the labourer's hearty voice, the cackling and crowing in the poultry-yard. But at sea the dawn awakens no life : the horizon becomes a hard dark line girdling a melancholy waste of waters. But soon the rising sun, resting a dazzling silver point upon the rosy sea-line, makes the scene joyous ; the waters flash like a mighty prism, you behold the topmost sails of

the ship gleaming like porcelain, whilst the shadow of the night still lurks along the decks ; anon the whole fabric is steeped in the white radiance, and star-shaped brilliancies are kindled in the brass-work, and the glass breaks into a hundred flashing tints, and the decks glitter like fine dry sand. Another day has begun, and the watch on deck uncoil themselves from the nooks in which they have been dozing through the darkness, and grumblingly rig the head-pump and get the scrubbing-brushes and buckets along.

My eyes turned towards the schooner as the sun rose, and there she lay about a mile and a half ahead of us, with a narrow wake streaming a short distance astern of her, and the green waters caressing her glossy sides as she pressed smoothly and softly over them. A spark winked at her side, and a white cloud broke away from her, and sailed slowly down over her quarter, and before the report reached us a small red flag was quivering at her main.

‘ Lay aft here, Ransom !’ I sung out, ‘ and hoist the answering pennant !’

They hauled down the flag aboard the schooner, and substituted a whole row of gaudy bunting, that made the vessel look 'dressed' for a holiday. I worked away with the glass, consulting the signal-book as I made the numbers: '*Get your topgallant-mast swayed up and the yards crossed.*'

'Sensible advice, Captain Shelvocke; but you *might* have waited till eight bells, so as to give the watch below a couple of hours more rest.'

'All right, Ransom; hoist your answering pennant again.'

The flags were hauled down, and another string of them hoisted.

'*Will send help if required.*'

I answered by signalling that we should not require help.

'Never mind about washing the decks down,' I said to the men. 'Call all hands, one of you, and the rest turn to and clear away that topgallant-mast among the booms there, ready for swaying aloft.'

The thumping of a handspike on the fore-scuttle was followed by a gruff cry.

Parell was up in a trice : the rest of the watch below followed, and in a few minutes the men were springing about like cats to the tune of Parell's pipe. A jack-block was sent aloft, and the mast-rope rove. I pulled off my coat to give the men a hand. Slowly we swayed the mast up, fitted the shrouds, stays and backstays, manned the mast-rope, unbent the tripping-line, fiddled, and then set up the rigging.

In the midst of all this business Miss Palmer came on deck. I raised my hat to her, and went on with my work ; but now and again I would take a squint at her out of the corners of my eyes, and notice how sweetly pretty her face looked, with the varying expressions which entered it, as she watched our complicated labours, and followed with her glances the fellows aloft, who no doubt appeared to her to be astride of nothing and holding on by their eyelids.

By the time breakfast was piped the yards were crossed and the sails ready for bending. This, all things considered, was a very smartly-rushed job, and I praised the men highly for

their activity. Aloft the ship now looked as taut and handsome as she had appeared when we first sighted her ; and feeling exceedingly rough, dishevelled, and hot, I slung my coat over my arm and walked aft to the companion. Miss Palmer stood near it, and as I approached she exclaimed :

‘ Perhaps you will find time now, Mr. Madison, to shake hands.’

‘ I will shake hands with pleasure, but I am not in the trim to talk. You don’t know how hard it is for a sailor to make himself agreeable to ladies when he is not what you call tidy.’

‘ I hope I have not annoyed you by watching you at work,’ said she, demurely ; but with a movement of the eyelids that gave an odd, coquettish expression to her face.

‘ On the contrary ; nor am I annoyed that you should see me in this rig,’ said I, casting a look on my bare arms, and recollecting that the collar of my shirt lay wide open, and feeling that my hair was over my forehead, and my hat on the back of my head. ‘ Still, I hope you will not think me rude if I ask you

to excuse me until I have made myself ship-shape. You wouldn't like to be caught in the state you find me in, would you ?

'No, indeed,' she answered, laughing heartily, 'so pray let me keep you no longer,' and she struggled with another laugh as she walked away.

When I came on deck again I found her talking to Mrs. Solomons, who was dressed in rose-coloured satin, and an immense cream-coloured silk handkerchief over her head ; at each ear there hung a solid gold earring, shaped like a marlin-spike and pretty nearly as long ; a massive gold chain was slung round her neck, and under her half-dozen chins was a huge brooch containing Solomons in oils, with his right eye partially closed, as though he had just completed a bargain when he sat for this portrait. Against such a figure, Miss Palmer in her white dress and sunny hair looked like a lily alongside a peony. Her hat—I mean Miss Palmer's hat, for I love to be particular—was a simple white chip with a lilac satin ribbon bow in front ; small pearl earrings, pale lemon-coloured kid

shoes. What sort of taste would this be considered nowadays? I am old enough to think that well-dressed women wore prettier clothes when I was a youth, than well-dressed women do now. But, be this as it may, I never saw a dress, a colour, a pair of gloves or shoes, or a piece of jewellery on Madeline Palmer, that did not appear to have been invented for her particular face, figure, and character of beauty alone, and for nobody else, by an artist of high and impassioned judgment.

I see her in my mind's eye now, sitting on the skylight with Mrs. Solomons by her side, the sky as white as silver, with the morning sun beyond her, her beautiful winning grey eyes fixed upon me as I advance, threads of bronze hair stirring under the chip hat to the soft wind blowing out of the hollow of the great spanker, mittens as fine as cobwebs upon her hands as high as the sparkling rings, the clasped white fingers gleaming like new ivory upon the folds of her dress, the shadows of the two women black upon the sand-white deck at their feet.

‘I hope—speaking of you of course as a sailor, Mr. Madison—that you now feel yourself equal to the task of making yourself agreeable to ladies,’ says she, with a grave face, and running her eyes, with a laughing devil in them, over my clothes, as I salute Mrs. Solomons, and ask after Jonas.

‘My dear, the gentleman knows how to make himself agreeable,’ observes Mrs. Solomons, nodding at me amiably and encouragingly. ‘Will breakfast soon be ready, sir?’

‘By half-past eight, I hope, madam. Miss Palmer,’ said I, ‘as I feel qualified to talk now, let me ask you what sort of a night you passed?’

‘A very good night, indeed.’

‘No nightmares, I hope—no shadows of long-legged, yellow-faced Yankees flitting through your dreams?’

‘No, I was too tired to dream.’

‘Mr. Solomons was rather uneasy, or I should have slept well too,’ said Mrs. Solomons. ‘He was snuffling all through the

night like a charity boy. He is still abed, sir. I think he's took cold.'

'Very likely,' I remarked. 'I routed him out of a pool of dew here last night.'

'Now isn't that Jonas all over!' cried she. 'What does he want to go and lie in a pool of doo for? do you think he told me what he'd been doing? when I asked him what made him snuffle so, he said it was his nose. That's the thanks I got for troubling myself. But all husbands are alike. They only get took ill in my opinion to worry their wives. You never hear of a man falling ill when he's a sweetheart—do you now? No, he waits till he's a husband. But as my father, Mr. Aarons, of the Minories—perhaps you may have heard of him, mister? he has a picter-shop just opposite Wolf's, the wholesale clothier's—as my father used to say when anybody came to him with a trouble: "*What!* you think you're going to mend matters by making a fuss! Make a fuss and see what I'll do for you!" There's a great deal in that, sir!'

'A great deal, no doubt,' I replied, taking

her word for it, and exchanging a smile with Miss Palmer, as the fat old woman took a squint down the skylight, to observe what progress Ransom's preparations for breakfast were making.

'I have been admiring your schooner, Mr. Madison, as she slides along yonder with that line of foam against the band that looks like gold,' exclaimed Miss Palmer. 'What an exceedingly beautiful vessel she is! Do you notice the reflection of her sails in the green water, and how lovely her wake looks upon the sea, like a streak of hoar-frost slowly melting off a field? You can see her better from the bulwark.'

She crossed the deck as an excuse, I think, to get away from Mrs. Solomons, whose vulgarity, I was beginning to discover, was of that unpleasantly candid sort that keeps the fastidious listener in a constant state of suspense.

I followed her; but, instead of looking at the schooner, I watched her large, wistful grey eyes, and her coral-like ears, and her small, red-lipped mouth with the pearly teeth

glancing like snow, and the beautiful curve of her dimpled chin terminating in a throat of white velvet with the blue veins faintly marked ; her cheeks and forehead purely fine indeed, though beheld in the searching light of the sun—whose microscopic illumination what woman does not dread ? Well, well ; this is parish talk indeed ! But a woman is a rare bird to Jack, as any man shall discover who will ship himself for a voyage ; and when he meets with a girl like Madeline Palmer, he may surely be excused for pitching his quid overboard and sentimentalising for a spell.

And a word in your ear, mate, while I am on this tack. Might I make so bold as to suggest that it is pretty nearly time you dropped those notions of the typical sailor which you have got from your 'long-shore literature, and begin to examine the real man himself with your own eyes at first hand ? in order that he may get a chance of convincing you that he is not the wretched swab, the theatrical tar, the dummy in flowing breeches he is represented to be by writers who are

as ignorant of the sea as any ploughman, and whose receipt for the concoction of a British seaman is an hour's study of Dibdin's songs for such nautical terms as may there be read, a glazed hat and a junk of tobacco; but (as merchant mate or naval officer) a man who can act as a gentleman and converse as a gentleman—who in a word is about as much like the theatrical, poetical, and novelistic fresh-water mountebank whom the credulous people of the greatest maritime country in the world accept as a real sample of the men who fight their naval battles and circumnavigate the globe for their markets, as Punch is like Edmund Kean. Because a man is a sailor, because his life is passed upon the greatest wonder of the world, because he is driven by stress of profession to behold by day and by night the majestic scenery of the heavens and the deep—their glory, their terror, their beauty—must he have a mind impatient of higher objects than salt-pork and rum?—must his mouth be full of oaths, tobacco-juice, and professional terms?—must he accept as his likeness any

vulgar wretch whom the theatrical dressers force into duck-trousers, low shoes, and tarpaulin hat? Accept this low caricature as his portrait, and surely you do the seaman an unmanly wrong and a mean dishonour. Yet by such caricatures, literary and dramatic, is Jack sung, acted, drawn (and quartered, shall I say?) to the British public, who, in spite of leagues of after-dinner speeches, of poetry, stage-plays, and rant about meteor-flags, wooden walls *versus* wooden shoes, wet sheets and flowing seas, and bunting that has braved the battle and the breeze—know less about you, O ye mariners of England! your character, habits, and conversation, than the very rudest of the savage tribes, at whose distant isles ye have sometimes touched for water!

‘I wonder how our friends like their new quarters?’ continued Miss Palmer, keeping her eyes fixed upon the *Tigress*. ‘I dare say they miss the looking-glasses and gilt of the *Namur*, but Captain Shelvocke’s cannons and men will comfort them; at least I can answer for Colonel Bray.’

‘I guess by the smile that twinkles at the corners of your mouth, Miss Palmer, that the gallant colonel is not a hero in your eyes,’ said I.

‘Indeed he is not,’ she answered. ‘Why, you can’t imagine the cowardice that was shown on board this ship when the Americans boarded her. Not the least resistance was made; the men yielded like a flock of sheep. Colonel Bray, from whom much was to have been expected, after the numerous anecdotes he had favoured us with during the voyage, of his exploits on various battle-fields, turned as white as a sheet when the American vessel came alongside, and rushed into his cabin. The only person that showed the least spirit was Mr. Solomons, who cried out to Captain Salmon, “Do you mean to say you aren’t going to fight?” “No,” answered Captain Salmon, with his knees knocking together. “Then you’re a disgrace to your profession,” said Mr. Solomons, snapping his fingers, “and the sooner the Yankees despatch you the more obleeged English sailors ought to be to them!”’

The contrast of her sweet face and her mimicry was very entertaining, but very fascinating, too ; she burst into a laugh like a song when she saw me laughing, exclaiming :

‘One ought to be angry to be made to blush for one’s countrymen, but Mr. Solomons’ face when he snapped his fingers at Mr. Salmon was quite irresistible. I am sure the recollection of it will outlive the memory of my own feelings of horror and despair.’

‘I rather suspected the colonel’s valiance by his eager acceptance of our offer of the schooner’s accommodation,’ said I. ‘Yet he may be a braver man than we suppose—courageous ashore, perhaps : on the principle of an Irish major I once knew, who terrified a house full of people one night by the cries and yells he raised over a black-beetle he had found in his bed. When twitted on his cowardice—“What do ye mane?” said he. “Had a regiment of Frenchmen entered me room I’d have cut them to pieces, sir : such is me spirit. *But who’s going to face a black-beetle ?*”’

‘Yes, that is always the excuse of the

small-spirited men,' she said, laughing. "Confront me with any other danger than this, and you would see what a terrible fellow I am!" Yet the English must be a brave race, or they never could have won so many battles. But surely there are some dreadful cowards among them, Mr. Madison?"

'A few more than the country wants, I am afraid, though I am astonished that the number should be so small, considering the heaps of incompetent fellows who are poked into leading positions by private patronage. The best proof of the high standard of English courage is, that centuries, I may say, of departmental truckling, time-serving, neglect of conspicuous merit, and bestowal of place, power, and honours on men whose only significance lies among their relations, have not, down to the present year, unfitted us for opposing, and sometimes beating, the arms of the countries who bid us defiance. . . . All right, Ransom. Mrs. Solomons, breakfast is on the table. I cannot offer you my arm, as the companion-steps are rather
'w.'

‘Thank you, mister, I can manage without you.’

We bundled into the cabin, where I had the satisfaction of perceiving that Ransom had considerably improved upon his first notion of table-laying. The snowy damask tablecloth; the silver and crockery; the ferns around the skylight; the bright sunbeams slanting into a tall mirror that redistributed the light in warm ripples of radiance upon the glossy panelling—the whole topped by the fragrance of coffee and other good things—made the cabin appeal comfortably to the nose as well as the eyes; but the sweetest and fairest part of the whole arrangement, to my mind, was the presence of Madeline Palmer, who, after removing her hat, took a seat opposite me.

Mrs. Solomons came out of her cabin, and told us her husband was still abed, but felt better; so we sent him his breakfast by Ransom, who, at the old man’s request, left the door of the berth wide open.

‘For I can listen to you talking, if I can’t join in myself!’ Solomons shouted; ‘and

Rachel can hear me if I want anything, for I can't get out of my cot without help !

‘ That’s the worst of them things,’ observed Mrs. Solomons. ‘ They’re the orkadist inventions, and I only wonder that Mr. Solomons has the courage to trust himself in ’em. He has to get upon a cheer to reach it, and I’ve known him to be a quarter of an hour dodging it when the ship rolls, like a horse at the end of a bridle. He was as nigh killed as ever a man was a fortnight ago, for he jumped at the wrong time, the cheer upset, and there he was left clinging to the side of the cot. “ Push, Rachel !” he says to me ; and push I did until the puspuration flowed down my cheeks ; but the more I pushed, the further the orkud thing went towards the ceiling, until the vessel gave a heave the contrairy way, and his whole weight came against me, which obliged me to let go, or I should have been thrown down ; and then he says : “ For the Lord’s sake, Rachel, spread a mattress under me, to let me drop soft, or I shall break my neck—I know I shall !” and I had to pull my bed to pieces to let him fall soft, as he called it. I’d

as lief sleep hung up on a hook as in one of them swinging beds.'

'There she goes—giving all the family noose!' shouted Solomons, with his mouth full, which, added to the cold in his head, did not greatly improve the natural melody of his voice.

Mrs. Solomons made no answer, and I took advantage of the silence to ask Miss Palmer if she had written to her father to inform him of her intention to join him.

'No; I made up my mind to go out to him as soon as I learnt the state of his health; therefore I supposed my writing would have been to no purpose, as I counted on arriving at Jamaica as soon as, if not before, my letter could reach him.'

'He will be greatly surprised to see you, I dare say.'

'He will indeed, and a little angry too, I have no doubt,' she answered, smiling; 'but I think the unexpectedness of my appearance will produce the effect I want.'

'Your devotion should make him feel very proud of you,' said I, admiring the thoughtful

beauty her eyes had taken at the mention of his name.

‘I hope—if the movements of your vessel permit—to have the pleasure of introducing you to him,’ she said. ‘I am sure, after you have known him a little while, you will not wonder at my devotion.’

‘Rachel, another cup of coffee,’ shouted Solomons.

A footstep on the companion-ladder caused me to look around. Parell entered hurriedly.

‘The schooner has made a signal, sir, and shortened sail. We are driving down upon her fast.’

With an apology to the ladies, I left the table and ran on deck. My first glance was at the *Tigress*, at whose main was blowing a long blue and yellow pennant, her sails were shivering in the light breeze, and she was almost stationary upon the water; we were approaching her quickly, and already I could see Shelvocke’s figure mounted upon the bulwark ready to hail when we were within ear-scope. My second glance was around, but the horizon was speckless; indeed, the air

was marvellously transparent, and the water so brightly and beautifully clear down to the remotest reaches of it, that it was like looking at it through a lens.

As we neared the schooner they let her gather fresh way, and then gave her a sheer that brought the two vessels close. I immediately perceived that something unusual had happened or was about to happen ; all the passengers who had been transferred from the *Namur* were on the schooner's quarter-deck, and the bulwarks were lined with the heads of the crew. Two men were aloft on the topgallant-yard staring into the west with their hands sheltering their eyes, and above them on the royal-yard was Tapping, with his eye glued to a telescope that he was pointing into the quarter whither the men were gazing. I lifted my hat, and waited for Shelvocke's hail.

'The royals and topgallant sails of what is apparently a large ship heading directly for us have just been reported by the look-out men aloft,' he sung out. 'Should she prove an enemy, I will bother her with my shot

while you crack on every inch of sail you can spread and get away.'

'Right, sir.'

'I will haul the wind for her, and meanwhile you can check the weather main-braces. If she prove an enemy I will hoist a small red square flag at the fore—if a friend, the ensign at the peak.'

I held up my hand to betoken I heard him.

'The instant you see the red flag at the fore, square away and be off. I will worry the enemy until you are out of sight. Once clear, you will of course brace up sharp again, and make a course for Kingston.'

I touched my hat. He then turned and addressed some words to the passengers, and by the manner he pointed towards us and then towards the horizon where the stranger had been descried, I presumed that he was offering them a chance of returning to their old quarters. Evidently they preferred to remain where they were, for looking my way again he exclaimed: 'Keep a bright look-out for my signal, Mr. Madison, and try your craft

on all points should I fail to draw the enemy off. God speed !'

He waved his hand and sprang on to the deck ; the boatswain's pipe chirruped—jibs, topsails, and staysails poised their swelling folds between the lofty masts, and the noble vessel hauled away from us like a great white cloud.

I watched her, as she clove the bright green water, with a strong feeling of melancholy. I cannot express how endeared was the beautiful vessel to my mind, and how this adieu saddened me.

'Captain Shelvocke ought to be very proud of his *Tigress*,' said a sweet voice behind me. 'Surely, Mr. Madison, I cannot be wrong in supposing her to be one of the most graceful vessels ever built.'

'What a marvellously quiet footstep you have, Miss Palmer! Your tread is as soft as the fall of a leaf. Ay, indeed, as you say, the *Tigress* is a graceful vessel. Look how delicately her side curves as she heels over, and how richly her copper shines against the white foam ; and see how lovely is the swell

of the central cloths of her sails, while the leeches are as taut as harp-strings ; and notice how the sun sparkles in the bright wood of her masts and in the glass of her portholes and the burnished brass of the binnacle-cover ! Can you be surprised that a sailor should sometimes love his ship as a sweetheart, and think and speak of her with as deep a tenderness as if she were a woman ?'

'Not at all surprised, though I am unable to do full justice to the beauties you have so glowingly pointed out, as I do not quite understand all the terms you used,' she replied, looking at me with a grave face, but with an arch expression in her eyes : 'I thoroughly sympathise with a sailor's love for his ship, and think him a very wise man indeed to pin his affection to an object so full of life, beauty, and fidelity.'

'Yes, fidelity certainly, whether beautiful or not,' said I, searching her eyes for a deeper meaning than lay in her words, and only getting puzzled for my pains.

'Fidelity, of course, so long as she keeps afloat. If she sinks and drowns her lover,

she may be said, I suppose, to have betrayed his confidence ?

‘ You push the allegory too far,’ said I, laughing.

‘ Will you tell me what the schooner wanted ?’

I explained.

‘ Where is the ship ?’ she inquired, looking around her.

‘ Yonder,’ I replied, pointing ; ‘ she will heave in sight presently. Meanwhile I must watch the *Tigress* closely for her signal.’

I fetched a telescope, and placed a chair alongside the gun upon which I had been leaning. Miss Palmer seated herself whilst I sighted the glass. Some hands were aloft bending the royal and topgallant sails to the yards which had been crossed before breakfast. I called to them to tell me if they could see anything of the vessel beyond the schooner.

‘ Ay, plainly, sir,’ replied one of them ; ‘ she’s under a press of sail, but she rises slow.’

‘ I am not sorry that Mr. Solomons is in

bed, Miss Palmer; his wife will no doubt remain in his cabin, and I shall be spared a worrying cross-examination.'

'Oh, they are very good-natured people,' she answered, 'though more vulgar than I should have thought possible in persons possessed of so much wealth as they are said to have. Pray don't suppose I mean that money refines, but one always *is* astonished to find the airs and graces of cooks and dustmen in people possessed of wealth. I did not greatly fancy the Solomons at first, but as I grew used to their talk and manners, I found them more endurable as acquaintances, until at last they have really made me like them.'

'For that they must surely be more indebted to your kindness than to themselves.'

'Mr. Madison, as a sailor you ought to be a liberal-minded man.'

'I am,' I interrupted.

'Prejudice is bad enough in a person like me, who has never travelled out of England and is acquainted only with people in my own

sphere of life. But in men who have visited all sorts of countries, and beheld all sorts of persons, prejudice is incomprehensible ; to call it intolerable would not express my opinion of it.'

' Really, Miss Palmer, I hope——'

' I am not in the least personal in what I am saying!' she exclaimed, with her rich, hearty laugh. ' When one meets people like Mr. and Mrs. Solomons, one ought to think of one's self as a traveller who has lighted on a new kind of flesh and blood, that may be very vulgar, glittering, tawdry and uncomfortable, according to one's own ideas of correct behaviour, but that *is* flesh and blood for all that like one's self, and that may be—*unlike* one's self—full of kindness, generosity, and good feeling—even above the mark that one has been used to find in fine ladies and gentlemen.'

' Quite so, and I am thankful for a good idea.'

' People like Mr. and Mrs. Solomons can no more help being vulgar and tawdry than a negro can help being black, Mr. Madison.

But if the negro be a good man, shall his black skin prevent you from acknowledging him to be what you gentlemen call a good fellow, and liking him for that goodness? Mr. and Mrs. Solomons drop their *h*'s, I know, and call you *mister*, and say "you was," instead of "you were," and have a shocking bad taste in colours and jewellery. But if they are a kind and friendly-disposed couple, willing to oblige you in any way you may suggest, do not they deserve from liberal-minded persons the esteem they would get from narrow-minded persons were they *polished*, and only polished?'

'You reason so well that, to answer you like an Irishman, you would persuade me to your way of thinking whether I agreed with you or not. But I do agree with you, and that my sincerity may be proved, I will ask you to observe the reverence which the Solomonses will henceforth receive from me.'

The effort of speaking had raised a charming flush on her cheeks, and her fine eyes sparkled as she laid her head back on the

chair and looked, with a smile brightening her parted lips, at the men at work aloft.

‘I have done with Mr. and Mrs. Solomons,’ said she. ‘Let us talk no more of them.’

‘Very well, Miss Palmer.’

‘If that strange ship for which you are watching should prove to be an enemy, will you be able to escape from her?’

‘With the help of the *Tigress* I shall hope to do so.’

‘And if you fail?’

‘We mustn’t fail.’

‘How can you have the heart to coolly argue with me on prejudice, Mr. Madison, when, for all you know, a serious danger is at hand?’ said she, turning her eyes fully and searchingly upon me.

‘The danger—if danger there be—is as obvious to you as to me; yet you can argue on prejudice as coolly as I.’

‘Perhaps I am not afraid,’ she exclaimed. ‘You see we have a new captain and crew; and besides, Colonel Bray is not here to dishearten me with his white face. However, do

not suppose I undervalue the risk we are going to run because I find nothing to disturb me in your manner. I quite understand from your explanation that the *Tigress* will endeavour to divert the strange ship, should she prove an enemy, from chasing us by firing at her ; but if the *Tigress's* tactics fail, and the stranger sails faster than we—and I may tell you, Mr. Madison, that the *Namur* is not a fast ship—we shall be captured ?

‘ If—if ! But you know that where there’s an “if” there’s a way. You have certainly construed my brief explanation with surprising precision ; no sailor who had been to sea all his life could have put our possibilities in a more ship-shape manner before me. And now I will ask you to let us talk no more of the strange ship. You owe me that kindness for dropping the subject of the Solomonses.’

‘ Very well, Mr. Madison ; but you must allow me to help you to watch for the vessel. What part of the sea will she first appear in, did you say ?’

‘ Yonder, to the left of the schooner.’

She shifted the position of her chair, and

we watched together for some time without speaking. But though I did not speak, I was full enough of thought—as the boy said of the parrot that wouldn't talk. In writing of this girl I can only set down, of her conversation, the few passages of it which I recall—common-place enough they are, too, you think ; and so I should think myself, did they not come back to me informed and illuminated by her rich melodious voice and laugh, the varying expressions of her face, beautiful in every change ; her deep, sincere grey eyes, now smiling, now wistful, now searching, now inscrutable, as they looked inward or away beyond where my imagination could follow ; and, above all, by the permanent and picturesque quality of refined frankness, sometimes warmly cordial, but always maidenly, that was as active and as essential a part of her delightful character as her heart was of her body.

‘Sail ho!’ she presently sung out, imitating the nautical cry, but in tones like the lower notes of a flute.

I looked at her and laughed, then peered ;

but seeing nothing, levelled the glass, and immediately made out a quivering gleam of white, like a fragment of paper upon the water-line.

All this while the schooner, under a whole cloud of canvas, was drawing away from us fast, and by this time had stretched well towards the stranger, lying up so as to bring her about two points on the starboard bow. The wind had breezed up somewhat, and deepened the green of the water, and was making it twinkle under the brilliant sunshine with glancing foam, and my crew were singing out as they sheeted home the newly-bent royal and topgallant sails, and tailed on to the halliards. The sails of the distant ship rose out of the sea like the disc of the moon, with the silvery whiteness of that planet, and with much of the effect of the beauty of her slow and mild enlargement. I watched cloth after cloth rise up, until the foot of her fore-course was an arch upon the horizon; but it was impossible to guess her character or even to form an opinion of her size at that distance.

‘ Parell,’ I called, keeping my eye all the time at the glass that covered the schooner : ‘ turn all hands up to stand by to man the weather-braces, and see your stun’-sail gear all clear.’

‘ Is it possible to tell what country a ship belongs to before she shows her flag, Mr. Madison ?’ asked Miss Palmer.

‘ Sometimes, but we never can be sure. The Americans mix so much cotton in their canvas, that their vessels may occasionally be known by their sails. Yonder fellow’s are white enough.’

‘ They are like snow.’

‘ Yes ; but the morning light streams broadly on her,’ said I, ‘ and it must be old and soiled canvas indeed that will not gleam like swan’s-down at that distance, and in such brilliant sunshine.’

I shifted the glass as I spoke from the schooner to the ship beyond. The upper portion of her hull was just visible, and as she had studding sails set on both sides, she looked like the brow of a big white cloud projecting above the horizon.

I put the telescope down and glanced aloft, mentally calculating the extra sail it was in our power to make. Some minutes passed, the *Tigress* had fined down into a small but clearly-marked shape upon the sea; she looked like a toy, and yet the atmosphere was so exquisitely transparent that even at that distance her standing rigging was visible to the naked eye. Beyond and ahead of her towered the form of the stranger, heading so straight for us that her three masts were in one.

All at once I noticed a small black ball soar against the schooner's foresail, and as it sped like a bird to the fore mast-head, the canvas quivered as though viewed through a haze of heat.

'By Jupiter, she is going about!' I exclaimed — 'look out now!' And I had scarcely said this, when the little dark pellet at the mast-head broke into a gleaming red flag, and there was the schooner edging away on the port-tack. I dashed down the glass, and sprang to my feet.

'Round in the weather main-braces!' I

shouted : 'let go to leeward—put your helm up there—cheerily now !'

For some minutes all was bustle ; ropes flung down, men singing, yards creaking.

'Steady—so ! keep her at that. Up aloft, some of you, and get the lower fore and top mast stun'-sail booms rigged out !'

The men, comprehending the position, rushed actively as cats into the rigging. I ran aft to look at the compass. The shifting of the helm had brought both the schooner and—as I might now call her—the enemy a little abaft the beam, by which manœuvre I had got the wind into the quarter that rendered every cloth we could stretch upon the *Namur* serviceable. Tearing off my coat, I sprang into the waist to help the men to send the studding-sails aloft ; this done, the main top-mast studding-sail boom was run out, and while we were setting this sail, the top-gallant studding-sail was got ready. We toiled like madmen ; and thirty men, working with ordinary smartness, could not have made greater despatch with the job of cracking on sail than we. The ship felt the increased

pressure, and a belt of foam, like newly-drawn milk, hummed pleasantly alongside.

Nothing more could be done for the present; and, glass in hand, I posted myself abreast of the main-brace bumpkin, and watched the two vessels to windward. Miss Palmer came quietly along the deck, and stationed herself at my side.

‘The race has fairly begun,’ said she; ‘of course, the ship is an enemy?’

‘Yes; that red flag on the schooner says so!’

‘She looks a very large ship, Mr. Madison?’

‘Apparently what sailors call a heavy corvette. I think there can be no doubt of her being an American.’

I was watching the enemy steadfastly through the glass, and was a little more dismayed perhaps than I ought to have been by the formidable appearance she presented, now that her hull was hove up and the whole massive fabric, from the water-line to the main-truck, visible. Suddenly she braced up her yards, hauled the wind, and

took in her lee studding-sails. The whole manœuvre was executed in a breath.

‘After us, by heaven!—and see, she tries her range!’

A mass of white smoke sailed out of her lee-bow from a gun evidently aimed at the *Tigress*, who was in stays, having tacked the instant the enemy put her helm down. But before the report of the cannon rolled down to us, a red light flashed on the schooner, and there blew from her side a cloud that resembled a small ball of cotton-wool, which grew bigger and bigger as it drove along the water. The two reports reached us one after the other, like a double-knock on a door.

‘This won’t do, Parell!’ I sung out. ‘We must make a stern chase of it, or that fellow will be striking us at an angle. So square away fore and aft, and get your port stun’-sail booms rigged out, and the sails hoisted!’

The ship was now put dead before the wind—but a few moments after our helm was shifted the enemy shifted his—and there he was, dead in our wake, though, to be sure, a long way astern, with studding-sails out on

both sides. It was now evident that he twigged our tactics, and that the *Namur* was the particular game he aimed for. This indeed might have been anticipated, for our character would be guessed by many signs transparent enough to a nautical eye, and they would reckon by the trim of our hull that we were a well-freighted ship.

But they had yet to learn the sort of stuff the *Tigress* was made of.

Shortly after she had discharged her first shot at the enemy, she again tacked, and whilst in stays, dosed the corvette with a broadside. The salute was immediately answered by a furious discharge that, to all appearance, did the schooner no injury whatever. I saw her white sails gleaming unscathed upon the towering withe-like masts as the noble little vessel shot into the wind ; and as she luffed to meet the breeze, she fired single shots at the big enemy, one after another, as fast as her guns could be loaded.

‘ They’ll never be able to stand her if once they let her get to windward ! ’ I exclaimed,

thinking aloud in my excitement. 'Look how magnificently she holds her luff and crawls upon the enemy's quarter, dosing her with shot which I *know* must be heavily telling ; and every foot of progress she makes weakens the enemy by a gun whilst she keeps her helm amidships ! Bravo, Shelvocke ! that was nobly managed !' I shouted, as a line of flame belched from the schooner's side, and shrouded her in a thick canopy of smoke. 'Will the fools let him rake them ! See, he tacks again ! By heaven, he has the English ensign hoisted ! Well done, little one ! Load again smartly — but hold your shot a few moments longer, until you open his stern !'

In my excitement, and utterly unconscious of what I was doing, I had seized Miss Palmer's arm by the wrist, and was flourishing it as though I grasped a cutlass.

'Dear me ! I most sincerely beg your pardon. I hope I have not hurt you, Miss Palmer ?'

'Not in the least—indeed, I did not feel your hand,' she replied, laughing heartily, but with her eyes all aglow with the excitement of

the scene. 'Oh, Mr. Madison, what courage your people are showing! How splendidly your captain works his vessel! It makes one's heart leap to see such heroism! Contrast the sizes of the two ships—and see how manfully the *Tigress* fights her enemy!'

By this time the men had done their work aloft, and, forgetful of the etiquette of ship-board in the deep interest of the moment, had grouped themselves upon the quarter-deck to watch the vessels astern of us; and there we all stood, looking intently one way, whilst from time to time exclamations broke from the men as the cannonading between the schooner and the corvette grew heavier and heavier. It was not always easy, however, to see what the combatants were about, for the smoke of the guns rolled down between them and us, and floated like a dense fog upon the water, producing a very remarkable appearance with the effect of the seas brilliantly sparkling on either side of it; but now and again the folds would be rent asunder by the breeze and form a lane, through which sometimes the ship and sometimes the schooner,

sometimes both vessels together, were visible, gleaming like spectral forms amid the snow-white convolutions of smoke which framed their shining sails.

‘She don’t seem inclined to let us go, sir,’ said Parell, chewing his junk of tobacco in his excitement as earnestly as if he were eating his breakfast. ‘The little ’un can’t divart her.’

‘It certainly looks like it,’ I replied gloomily, as, through a break in the smoke, I noticed the towering form of the ship heading dead for us and overhauling us slowly, but most surely. Indeed, the *Namur* was one of those fat, stumpy ships which need a gale of wind to drive them. She was what old women would call a safe boat, high and dry, very roomy and very strong—a big, motherly, lubberly craft, but heavy to work and heavy to sail; and that the corvette gained but slowly upon her was pretty good proof that *she* was by no means a clipper either, and that if Shelvocke could only induce her to tackle him, the field would soon be clear for us.

‘*Now* what’s the matter?’ wheezed a voice behind me. ‘What a wonderful thing it is people won’t leave one another alone. More powder wasting, and for *what*?’

I turned and confronted Mr. Solomons, and behind him stood his wife.

‘Good-morning, Mr. Solomons; I am glad to see you on deck. I hope your cold is better?’

‘Good-morning, thir. Good-morning, Miss Palmer. No, my cold is *not* better, I’m obliged to you. Will you be good enough to tell me what’s going on yonder?’ said he, extending his shrivelled shining hand towards the two vessels.

‘The big chap is in chase of us, and the *Tigress* is trying to claw him into turning upon her, so that we may escape. That’s all, Mr. Solomons.’

‘That’s *all*, indeed!’ cried Mrs. Solomons. ‘A pretty big all it looks to me, Jonas. What might the ship be, mister?’

‘An American, I suspect.’

‘What?’ squealed the poor woman, with a wild toss of her hands, whilst her face turned

to the colour of a blanc-mange, and looked uncommonly like one too, with her chins quivering one on top of the other. 'Another American! Now, Jonas, what did I tell you? didn't I beg and pray of you to change into the schooner? Here's a pretty mess! no sooner out of one trouble than into another. Why didn't you accept the gentleman's offer to change your ship like the others did?'

'Don't bother *me*!' growled her husband. 'Blarst the Americans!'

'You needn't alarm yourself, Mrs. Solomons,' said I, noticing the crew grinning as they ran their eyes over her figure. 'We shall be able to give that fellow the slip, I have no doubt.'

'Come and stand by me, Mrs. Solomons, and watch the magnificent courage the little *Tigress* is showing: such a sight would give spirit to a mouse!' exclaimed Miss Palmer, turning her flushed face and flashing eyes towards the fat lady.

'No thank you, miss; I take no interest in such shows. I only beg and pray that this gentleman will take us away from that ship

as fast as iver he can,' responded Mrs. Solomons.

'Here, sit down, Rachel, sit down!' shouted Solomons. 'I'll not have the gentleman worried in the execootion of his duty. Will one of you please to bring that cheer—thank you. Now, Rachel, sit down and make yourself comfortable, for God's thake!'

The poor woman, convulsing her body in dumb-show after the manner of her nation, seated herself. Solomons approached me close, and with a slight droop in his right eye, as he jerked his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of his wife, whispered:

'Joking apart, thir, what's the danger?'

'There is really no *joking* that I am aware of,' said I, drawing away and answering in my usual voice, and by no means relishing the cunning air he put into his accost, as though he were a receiver addressing a pick-pocket. 'Yonder are the two vessels, and by looking at them you will know as much as I do.'

And to escape him I crossed the deck.

The breeze was scarcely noticeable as we

drove dead before it. The smoke of the guns was blowing in long, languidly-moving lines past us, and the taste of burnt gunpowder was strong in the mouth with every breath we drew. The *Tigress* had got to windward, or, in other words, right astern of the enemy, who was blazing away at the little vessel with her stern-chasers, and receiving in return the whole fire of the schooner's port and star-board broadsides alternately. I was so certain that the corvette could not much longer endure these fearful and repeated scarifications that I lost the fear of her overhauling us in speculating upon the moment when she would drop her pursuit to turn upon the schooner.

‘She’s being raked every minute, sir!’ exclaimed Parell, coming over to me. ‘One ’ud think such an iron drenching was more than flesh and blood could stand. And yet her spars seem all right, sir.’

‘Forward they are: Captain Shelvocke always aims low. If the corvette lets him rake her like this, she’ll soon have no men to resist him. But it *can’t* last! why, good

heavens, Parell, the *Tigress* has it all her own way—look at her under her jib and fore-sail, porting and starboarding her helm as she loads her guns—how fiercely she fires! what a burr for a ship's skirts! . . . Hillo! is that for us?’

A puff of smoke leapt as I spoke from the corvette's bow, and a spurt of white foam sparkled like a bar of bright silver about a hundred fathoms astern of us.

‘Heavy metal, sir!’ grumbled Parell; ‘a thirty-two pound ball, that, sir.’

‘There! I *knew* it could not last!—goaded at last into it, are you, you villain!’ I shouted, as the corvette took in her studding-sails, and slowly swept round, bracing her yards sharp up as she hauled her wind, whilst she discharged her weather broadside at the schooner, who, with splendid alertness had covered her spars with canvas and was creeping dead away to windward, peppering the corvette as she went with balls from her stern-gun. ‘Was there ever a finer fellow than Shelvocke!’ I cried, in a transport of admiration. ‘Look! he brings the enemy

after him as though he had her tow-rope aboard.'

And assuredly the courage, the agility, the dashing and audacious seamanship that had been shown by the *Tigress* in this brief but decisive bit of work would have kindled enthusiasm in a heart of stone. But these qualities were immeasurably deepened to us witnesses of Shelvocke's conduct by the heaviness of the stake that depended upon the issue of it. Had the enemy been suffered to approach us within range, one broadside would, in all probability, have crippled us, and left us at her mercy; instead, there was the corvette stretching away from us in pursuit of the schooner, whose heels gave her about as much chance as Mrs. Solomons would have had in a race with a boy.

'One 'ud need read a good bit of history to come across anything neater than that, sir,' exclaimed Parell, biting out another piece of tobacco to replace the quid he had masticated and probably swallowed. 'She *is* a Yankee, sir; you can see her flag now,' he continued, handing me the glass, 'and you may like-

wise observe that she's lost her mizzen-top-gallant mast.'

Yes ; the stripes and stars hidden from us whilst she had been running could now be seen streaming from the mizzen-peak as the corvette stretched her long, low, black hull broadside on to us, leaning under the volume of sail she carried, with men swarming like bees upon her mizzen-rigging and a sharp throbbing and quivering of foam along her side.

'There goes the enemy, Mr. Solomons,' said I, crossing the deck and addressing the old man as he stood staring with knitted brows at the vessels. 'You may very safely return to your bed now, sir, and continue nursing your cold.'

'Thank ye, I think a cigar on deck'll do me more good, mister,' answered the old fellow, slapping his breast-pockets in search of a cheroot ; and then taking a look at the compass, he bawled out, 'I say ! where are you taking us, mister ?—this here's the road to Europe, do you know ?' and as he stood pointing at the compass he sloped his back in

such a way that the sleeve of his coat was drawn up his arm, and his hand and wrist forked out like a skeleton's.

'I am very well aware of it,' said I, in a voice that stopped him from asking any further questions. He joined his wife, and they sat talking together and gesticulating.

I stood near Miss Palmer, watching the lessening vessels, whose increasing distance was denoted both to the eye and the ear by their dwindling shapes and by the lengthening intervals between the flashes of the guns and the sound of the detonations. They glided along the water that ran up to the beautifully clear and blue horizon like a large and a small cloud sailing across the sky, the schooner keeping well ahead of the corvette so as to enable her to use only her bow-guns, and keeping her station with the utmost ease under her mainsail, staysail, and jibs.

'I was very much afraid, Mr. Madison,' said Miss Palmer in a low voice, 'that you were going to reproach me for having spoken well of Mr. Solomons. His remark just now was certainly very offensive. But you

are too kind to make him a topic of conversation—at all events for the present.’

‘I wish they would both take to their beds and stop there until we arrived at Kingston,’ said I.

‘Pray talk of the schooner, not of Mrs. Solomons!’ she urged in a half-laughing manner, though the flush and sparkle which the watching of the vessels had kindled in her cheeks and eyes still lingered, and made her look so beautiful that it needed all the forces of my good taste or good sense to prevent me from staring her out of countenance. ‘How wonderfully Captain Shelvocke has drawn that ship away from us! Mr. Madison, the very first person you must introduce me to at Kingston, should fortune permit us all to meet there, is your captain. I should like to tell him with my own lips what I have thought of his conduct, his skill, his admirable courage this day.’

Hallo, my boy! whence this palpitation, you fool? does the lovely girl’s praise of a brother sailor set your heart bounding with professional enthusiasm?

‘Why, Miss Palmer, as you say, the *Tigress*

has been admirably handled, no doubt, and it is quite natural that you should give all the praise to her commander, although his judgment would not have been of much use had he not had a number of brave seamen under him to execute his orders without a single thought of the perilous game their skipper was playing. He will, I am sure, be immensely gratified by your praise, and I heartily hope I may have an opportunity of introducing him to you.'

This was not my usual style, nor my usual voice either. She bent her clear searching eyes on my face, and a smile twinkled through them like a sunbeam sailing betwixt two clouds over a space of water. I suppose the conscience that makes cowards of us all caused me to colour up under her quick, penetrating glance. She was merciful enough to take no further notice of my speech, in which I assuredly did my heart a wrong, for I protest no living being could have had a warmer admiration for Shelvocke than I, nor could have taken a more critical delight in the genius with which he had pestered and goaded into

courting him the ugly *baste* whose horns, but for him, would by this time have been goring the *Namur*. But lord! what a poor and twopenny affair the human heart must be after all, when a pretty woman's praising a man will fill his friend's mouth with pooh pooh's, meanly intended to qualify the acquiescence he is too cowardly and yet too honest to withhold!

My thoughts went in this strain as Miss Palmer and I stood looking across the sea, until at last I did feel so impatient with myself for my self-misrepresentation, and was so worried by the subacid significance taken by my words through Miss Palmer's silence, that I could stand it no longer.

'That was a mean speech of mine,' said I, 'and not true in spirit. What on earth could have made me want to shake half the leaves out of your wreath for Shelvocke when only just now I was shouting my applause of him, and when I know him to be as intrepid and fine a seaman as ever swung along a ship's deck?'

And as I asked this question I looked at her steadily, being at this time, for reasons I

am unable to account for, in as verdant and unsophisticated a humour as was my uncle Toby when he explored the lambent and delicious fires of Mrs. Wadman's eye for the bit of green that never yet lurked in the deflowered optic of a widow.

'By proceeding just as we now steer, what part of the earth should we come to, Mr. Madison?' she inquired artlessly, sidling to the compass, and looking at it stedfastly.

Well, if I was stupid enough not to know the cause, it was not her business to hunt about for it.

'I will repeat my question another day, as they say in the House of Commons,' said I, smiling at the sweet, grave face she bent over the binnacle. 'And now, Miss Palmer, let me conduct you to a seat in the shadow of the mast yonder, out of reach of the sun, where I shall be happy to answer every inquiry you wish to make touching the navigation of the *Namur*.'

She put her fingers under my arm, and walked a few paces, but stopped to look back at the vessels.

looking three minutes, when the sound of a voice humming a tune made me turn my head, and there was Miss Palmer close behind me.

‘I want to see the last of the brave little *Tigress*,’ said she; ‘and will you tell me if there is the smallest probability of the American ship catching her?’

By way of answer, I poised the glass on my shoulder, and bade her look at the schooner.

‘Only her sails are visible,’ said she

I shifted the glass, and asked if she saw the American.

‘Yes, quite distinctly.’

‘You can judge of the distance between the two vessels?’

‘I can.’

I told her to take notice that the schooner had only half as much sail set as it was in her power to carry, and that her being able to hold her distance from the American under such conditions proved that were the whole of her canvas to be exposed she would be out of sight of her pursuer in four hours.

‘And why does not Captain Shelvocke run out of sight?’ she wanted to know, continuing to peer through the glass, and to maintain a posture I was very willing and indeed decidedly happy to endure in her so long as she chose to preserve it.

I replied that if the *Tigress* ran away, the American would immediately pay off in chase of us again.

‘Shelvocke’s object,’ said I, ‘is to put the widest distance he can make the Yankee sail over, between us and the enemy. Jonathan’s quandary is this: he can’t capture the *Tigress* because he can’t catch her, and he can’t pursue us because the *Tigress* won’t let him.’

‘And how will it end as regards the schooner?’ said she with her eye at the glass, and her face, in consequence, so close to the hinder part of my shoulder that once or twice the forepart of her straw hat tickled the back of my neck.

‘Why, Jonathan will follow Shelvocke as long as he remains in sight,’ I replied, ‘putting his hopes, as all men must who chase

a vessel, in a slant of luck. But blow high or blow low, the ship that can overhaul the *Tigress* is not to be seen within the circumference of this horizon, and I shall be very much astonished if the first person who boards the *Namur* on her arrival at Kingston be not Massa Shelvocke.'

She lifted the glass from my shoulder, and while she slowly closed the tubes, she said :

'And now may I ask, Mr. Madison, what *you* mean to do ?'

'Certainly you may. I shall steer as we go until noon'—I pulled out my watch and observed that it wanted twenty-five minutes to eleven—'by which hour the corvette, unless she alters her course, will be some miles away behind the sea. I shall then order the men to trim sail, the helm will be shifted, and the good ship *Namur* headed as the wind will best let her go for Jamaica.'

'Thank you for your answers,' said she, giving me the glass. 'You have made my mind so easy that the very least I can do is to unreservedly forgive you for pretending to believe that my hearing had been affected.'

She dropped me a low curtsey, wonderfully graceful indeed, and so playful that the fellow who was steering turned his head to hide a grin. I acknowledged the salute with a regular ball-room flourish of the leg, to let those it concerned know that I could bow as well as she ; then she tripped on her noiseless little feet over to the Solomonses, flinging, as she went, a backward glance at me that said, ' I am going to comfort these poor creatures,' and forthwith repeated to them what I had said to her, for which I was exceedingly obliged, as she saved me a deal of trouble by doing so.


I stood watching the two vessels, not without anxiety, and saw the topmost point of the schooner's canvas vanish like a tiny wreath of steam. Although the corvette's hull had sunk and half her courses were invisible, I observed by means of the glass that she continued to fire at the chase, for every now and again a shadow like that of a cloud passing over some distant point blew athwart of, and temporarily obscured her, but as it went clear it became white, and large, and

quivering, and hung like a burst of vapour from a steam boiler upon the sea, that was as blue as the sky out there. Bit by bit the gleaming and tapering height of canvas sunk lower and lower, until at last nothing but a fluctuating brilliant shred, hove slightly above the water-line by refraction, could be seen trembling like a sparkling dew-drop ; it disappeared, and the whole bright circle, of the horizon was a blank.



CHAPTER VI.

FIRE!

HILST the schooner was in sight my mind, so to speak, had something to hold on by, and the sense of loneliness was not so sharply brought home to me ; but when at midday (the two vessels having then been out of sight from our main-royal yard for over an hour) I ordered the studding-sails to be hauled down and the ship to be brought close to the wind, the responsibility of my position weighed heavily upon me. Here was I launched in charge of a large and apparently a richly-freighted ship upon a sea that was infested with picaroons, Jamaica distant a good ten days' sail under favourable circumstances, and with only fifteen

men and a boatswain's mate to work the vessel and to resist any attack that might be made upon us.

And yet Shelvocke was not to blame for the situation in which he had placed or left me. I did not know what his loss had been in killed and wounded through the engagement with the prize-crew of the *Namur*, but I easily guessed it so severe as to prohibit him from weakening the available force of his men by a larger draft than the sixteen seamen whom he had placed under my command. That no one was to blame, however, and that what had happened could not be helped, did not improve my case. I could only trust to chance, and live in the hope of being lucky enough to carry the *Namur* to Kingston without misadventure.

Although the breeze that was blowing was strong enough to have driven the schooner eight or nine knots an hour, this lumbering West Indiaman was barely doing four. Indeed, she was the slowest sailer I had ever dealt with: a regular sugar-box, built for carrying, with bows as round as the back view

of a Dutchman, and of a most massive scantling. She was about six hundred tons burden, but her immense beam made her look two hundred tons bigger than that ; and being very heavily-rigged, with immensely thick lower masts and shrouds, which appeared to have been shifted into her from a line-of-battle ship, she would have passed very well, viewed lengthwise, for a man-of-war, though her stern was a strong indication of her true character. Her weight and stubbornness made my look-out about four times as formidable as it would have been had she been a fast boat, and rigged with greater regard to the laws of proportion. Her yards swung heavily, her running-gear 'hung,' she was as hard to steer as a raft ; and when I looked over her stern and observed her broad oily wake stretching away towards her weather-quarter, I easily guessed, as any sailor will suppose, what her quality of weathering would prove in a gale of wind.

However, it was my duty to put a good face on the matter, as much for the sake of the men, whom the least air of misgiving in me

would speedily dishearten, as for the passengers who had entrusted themselves to my keeping. I left Parell on deck, and employed myself for some time in overhauling the chart and working out the observations I had taken at noon, and then lay down in my bunk and endeavoured to snatch an hour's rest before dinner ; but I was too anxious to sleep, and so to kill the time I took a book—I well remember it was a copy of the *Edinburgh Review*—and tried to get interested. But it would not do. All the time I was thinking of our defenceless condition in case of an attack, and asking myself if I had done my duty to Miss Palmer to suffer her to remain in the *Namur* after Shelvocke had ranged alongside to report a strange sail in sight ; and I recalled—not willingly, by any means ; the abominable memories *would* intrude themselves—various stories I had heard of the barbarities practised by the pirates and privateersmen, towards whose haunts we were hourly drawing nearer, upon the women who fell into their hands.

In short, I suffered my fancies to make me

very nearly as miserable as the calamities I lay speculating upon would themselves have done. But it is sometimes possible for a man to go on thinking until he thinks himself clear of disturbing thoughts. I lay reasoning so morbidly, that at last my common sense found imagination insupportable, and I sprang out of my bunk damning myself for a fool as heartily as Jonathan Wild did his Tishy for being something else.

‘Is dinner ready, Ransom?’ I sung out as I entered the cabin.

He answered that he was waiting for my orders to fetch it from the galley; and in a few minutes it was smoking on the table, and the passengers and myself seated round it.

‘Once more assembled, Mrs. Solomons,’ said I, rather boisterously, as men sometimes will be who determine to be jolly in spite of themselves; ‘a most united and—shall I say, Miss Palmer—a most picturesque family? A smooth sea around us, fine weather over us, and a stout ship under us!’

‘A very stout ship indeed!’ growled Solomons; ‘I wish she was a little thinner—maybe she’d sail quicker.’

‘You must find sailing a very risky business, mister?’ said Mrs. Solomons, trying to catch sight of her plate by peering over her bosom—and failing. ‘There’s always something dangerous happening at sea; isn’t there? Either it’s a leak, or it’s wind, or lightning, or else it’s a ship a-chasing of one. If I had a son, he’d never go to sea with my leave.’

‘Thank you!’ interrupted Jonas; ‘a son of mine go to sea! he’d wait upon yer.’

‘For when all’s said and done,’ continued Mrs. Solomons, ‘there’s little enough money to be airned at it, they say.’

‘All very true, Mrs. Solomons,’ said I; ‘give me a good business ashore, I’d soon quit the sea.’

‘Did you ever hear of a thorough-bred sailor settling down to *business*, Mr. Madison?’ asked Miss Palmer, demurely. ‘Sailors abuse the sea heartily enough, I know, *when* at sea; but once put them on shore, and,

like geese, they immediately waddle to the water.'

'Pray say ducks,' said I. 'Ducks, as a word, is very much prettier than geese, and, when applied to sailors, truer.'

'What is your opinion of the sea, Mr. Solomons?' she inquired, evading my point.

'My opinion, miss?' answered the old man, slowly. 'If I was prime minister of England, I'd do away with gaols and make all felons thailors'—you have already noticed that our friend sometimes lisped. 'That would give the country plenty of seamen, and save the pockets of the tax-payers.'

'A neat compliment to the profession that has hoisted our little island at the world's mast-head!' I remarked.

Miss Palmer changed the topic by asking Mr. Solomons questions about the West Indies. Perhaps she knew that this was one of the subjects upon which the old man could talk well; and I suppose she had a personal interest in the exhibition of his best paces after having spoken up for him and his wife. He had lived in Jamaica thirty years, and

might therefore be supposed to know the country pretty intimately. He spoke with great intelligence, told two or three stories which really had fine humorous points in them, and gave me the impression, in spite of his lisping and his *h*'s, that he could talk like a man of education if he pleased, and that he deliberately chose to be vulgar, either to keep his wife in countenance or that he might not forge ahead of the sympathies of his own sect.

There is always something interesting to me in an old man of this kind who, cunning as he may be, makes you see he is infinitely shrewder than he wants you to believe—whose eyes steal up and down from the table to your face, and whose conversation is picturesque with grammatical lapses, keen observation, misplaced *h*'s and the illumination—the *lumen siccus*—of a mass of various, out-of-the-way, curious reading. He had much to say about slavery, and the prospects of Jamaica, and although I had not the least interest in the subject, he kept me listening with steady attention.

I caught Miss Palmer watching me with a teasing expression in her eyes. 'I'll make a large-minded man of you yet!' she seemed to say with those bright and eloquent telegraphs: 'You are beginning to lose your prejudice against this harmless old creature, are you?' A woman's heart is shown in the victories she likes to win. Miss Madeline took as much pleasure in watching the favourable impression old Jonas was making on me as any Mrs. Candour would have taken in attending the funeral of a reputation.

The afternoon wore away; at six o'clock the breeze failed us, and the sea lay heaving like a surface of molten glass. A thin haze gathered round the horizon like the mist that rises from the earth on hot summer mornings; and the reflection of the burning sun was as dark as Indian gold in the spacious and polished folds of the water. Though it wanted but two hours to sunset, the heat had at no other period of the day been greater than now. A steam arose from the decks, through which the lower masts quivered like the reflection of a tree in a running stream:

the smell of blistered paint and melting pitch made the stagnant air sickly with the taste of it ; I placed my hand by accident on the brass hood of the binnacle, and drew it away with an exclamation—it was like touching the top of an oven. The languor of the heat crept into one's very marrow. The men lolled about the decks with their shirts open, feebly moving when called, and pulling off their caps, and shaking their heads, to rid themselves of the perspiration that fell in showers from their hair and foreheads.

I had caused an awning to be spread over the quarter-deck, and under it lay Mr. Solomons in his shirt-sleeves, flat on his back on the deck, with a rolled-up flag under his head, and a long cigar stuck out of his mouth ; and Mrs. Solomons in an arm-chair, with her mouth open, and her arms hanging down her lap (her *lap*, do I call it ?), and her face as scarlet as a powder-flag, nothing to show that she was alive but the brightening and fading of her rose-coloured satin dress as her enormous shape swelled and subsided in it with her respirations ; and Madeline Palmer,

with her hat upon her knees, her slightly-lifted dress exposing an exquisitely-shaped foot, her head lying back, leaving the snow of her throat revealed from the chin to where the sparkling silver brooch connected the small white collar, sometimes languidly lifting her hand to stir the threads of hair upon her white forehead with a slow motion of the sandal-wood fan, that wafted a perfume as fragrant as jessamine through the air to where I stood leaning against the sky-light.

Happily the calm was but of short duration. Shortly after one bell the haze in the north-east blew away, and a light wind came down along the water like the shadow of a cloud over the silver surface of a field of rye. The yards were squared, a true course made, and with the light canvas swelling and her courses softly lifting, the *Namur* was again pushing through the calm sea, with her stem in a line with the broad deep-coloured gold band of sunshine that streamed from the horizon down, as it seemed to the eye, to within a pistol-shot of the ship's bows.

The breeze was as good as a cordial ; every faculty was refreshed by the cool blowing, the bubbly tinkling of the passing water, the diamond-like quivering of the whole sea.

‘If you want to see a noble sight, look yonder, Miss Palmer,’ said I, standing beside her, and pointing towards the sun. ‘But you must make haste.’

She instantly rose, and stood looking with me at the orb whose lower limb rested upon the water-line like a wheel. There was not a fleck of cloud to tarnish it ; the sky resembled a wall of resplendent brass, and the sun, by the unusually powerful refractive character of the atmosphere, was swollen into gigantic proportions. I never saw the like of it before : it was *startling* to behold ; the men stood in a group watching it, looking aft from time to time hurriedly, as though to mark the effect of this unusual appearance upon me.

‘See, Miss Palmer !’ I exclaimed : ‘the blazing circle compasses the whole bow of the ship ! Look how the magnificent cir-

cumference arches from one rail to the other on either side the bowsprit like the glory around the head of a saint. One would suppose that some star was on fire, and was falling close past the earth ! Did anyone ever see the sun so big before ! How clean the circle is ! not a single ray shoots from it—do you notice ? And observe the colour of the sea—one should be able to dip up gold enough to purchase a kingdom.'

'No wonder it's so hot, with such a sun as that to burn one up !' cried Mrs. Solomons from her chair.

'Confound her !' I muttered. 'Her voice destroys the charm, like a cry of oranges in a tragedy.'

'One never sees a sunset like that in England,' said Miss Palmer, almost in a whisper, so subdued was she by the sublimity of the spectacle. 'How the golden splendour runs up out of the sea as the sun sinks !'

The last glowing fragment throbbed and vanished ; she turned her eyes to the east, and looking up with her face like alabaster in

the brief pause of twilight, pointed towards the sky.

‘Do you remember the sweet old hymn?’ she said :

“‘Soon as the evening shades prevail,
The moon takes up the wondrous tale.”’

Adrian

And there was the new moon like a thread of silver in the light blue sky over the mizzen topsail yard-arm.

‘I have wished,’ said I : ‘have you?’

‘That our voyage may be speedy and safe, is my wish,’ she replied.

‘Amen to that for your sake,’ said I.

At eight o’clock my watch came round. I was not sorry that it should be so, as I had not only no inclination for sleep, but had no fancy for the sultry atmosphere of the cabin.

I was in anything but a cheerful mood. Something of the despondency that had bothered me during the morning had again visited me ; my nerves were irritable ; I was restless, journeying here and there about the

deck, staring into the starlit distances, and vexed by the droning of old Solomons' voice as he sat reading to his wife by the light of a little silver hand-lamp.

I attributed my mood, which was certainly an unusual one, to the blow I had received on the top of my head, and to the weakness caused by the effusion of blood ; neither of which things was calculated to rout out any remains which yet lingered of the long illness that had prostrated me before joining the *Tigress*. But this by the way, though I like to bear it in mind, as the confession of the temper that then possessed me does not quite give me the figure that the hero of a story should make.

Miss Palmer, who had been chatting with the Solomonses since supper, that was served at half-past seven, drew away when old Jonas began to read, and carried her chair right aft, where she sat leaning with her arms on the grating abaft the wheel. I imagined by her turning her back on the deck, and by her thoughtful pose, that she wished to be alone, so I did not go near her—though perhaps not

more for this reason than because of my own peevish indisposition to talk.

Presently I sung out : ' Forward, there ! who is that on the look-out ? '

' Saunders, sir,' came back the answer.

' Is Anderson there ? '

' Yes, sir,' replied the man himself.

' Take this glass, Anderson, and jump aloft and let me know if there is anything in sight.'

I followed his dark figure as he ascended the shrouds. He was remarkable for having the keenest eyes of any man aboard the *Tigress*, and had been Shelvocke's favourite look-out. Miss Palmer turned her chair round when I ordered the man aloft, and Solomons stopped his reading to listen. After a while the man hailed the deck ; the sound of his voice floated down through the darkness, and he seemed half a mile high in the air.

' There's nothing in sight, sir.'

' All right, my lad ; that will do. You can lay down.'

Solomons resumed his reading — *num*,

mum, mum. I went to the side to judge the speed of the ship by the passage of the bubbles which winked in the starlight as they slid along. Heaven knows, it was slow enough, although there was sufficient weight in the breeze to tauten the stay-sail sheets.

‘What makes you so restless, Mr. Madison?’ said Miss Palmer.

Her lips seemed at my very ear, so clear and bell-like was her articulation.

‘Upon my word, Miss Palmer, you have a famous knack of taking me unawares. Do you carry a pair of invisible wings, or have you the spirit-like quality of treading the viewless winds that you make no sound when you walk? Small wonder, with such a marvellously delicate tread, that you are one of the finest dancers mortal man ever had the honour of leading out. I can speak from experience, you know—of your dancing, at all events!’

‘I like your compliments very much,’ said she; ‘but I should prefer to have my question answered.’

‘Unlike most men, Miss Palmer, when I have nothing to say I hold my tongue,’ I answered, quoting her.

She laughed, remembering her phrase; but immediately afterwards said, very gravely, ‘Have you any cause to feel uneasy? You can answer me candidly, because you may trust me implicitly.’

‘See here, Miss Palmer; this is my first command. I am in charge of a ship manned by sixteen men, instead of the crew of four times that number which a vessel of this tonnage needs. I am answerable for the lives of three passengers; one of whom has a stronger claim upon my protection than I should know how to express in words were I asked to do so. Should I be fit for the post I occupy if the responsibilities of it did not make me anxious?’

‘Then you are uneasy only because of your responsibilities, and there is nothing but the fear that something *may* happen to worry you?’

‘Why, yes; that’s about it,’ said I.

‘I should like a walk, Mr. Madison. May

I take your arm ? Thanks—the vessel rolls a little now and then, and the dew makes the deck slippery.’

She commanded me just as a helmsman governs his ship. There was never anything very remarkable in her words, and yet they acted upon me like a tonic. But it was not what she said : it was her way of saying it—the beautiful song-like charm of her voice—the firm but womanly decision of character her manner expressed, that influenced me. Before we had taken half-a-dozen turns, she had made me as cheerful as I was before dull ; reasoned me out of my forebodings, and artfully drawn me into talking of pleasant things. And then—what was a charming surprise—she had no sooner effected her purpose of heartening me, than she changed her character. A sweet, teasing, coquettish air replaced her grave demeanour ; she had put herself in my place, so to speak, in order to advise and inspirit me. This done, she became the woman again ; and having got me into a condition of mind fit to be played with, she played with me.

Heaven knows if she was conscious of what she was doing : I was inclined to think she was. Anyway, it pleased me better to imagine that her captivating posture-making was no involuntary exercise, for I will say, at once—I was in love with her. Ay, the admiration she had kindled in me in Lady Tempest's ball-room had proved a rich soil ; besides, here we were in latitudes proverbially favourable to speedy and luxuriant growths. But she was the first girl I had ever fallen in love with in my life, and, honest soul that I was—for my heart esteems the man who is a greenhorn in his emotions—I was not only persuaded that she had no suspicion of what was in my mind, but I took, as I fancied, the utmost care, as we patrolled the *Namur's* quarter-deck, that no words of mine should make her reflective in that direction.

‘It is much too early,’ said I to myself, ‘and perhaps she may have left a sweetheart in England, or perhaps, in spite of her professed admiration of the sea, she would shudder at the notion of marrying a sailor, or perhaps’—but my modesty had a score of

reasons which need not be catalogued for throwing a veil over my heart, and though I believe I may have unconsciously pressed her hand under my arm against my side, and snatched every excuse to peer closely into her face, I flattered myself when I bade her good-night that she had as little suspicion that I was deeply in love with her, as I had that she had any more romantic feeling for me than a kindly friendship.

She had lingered to a late hour on deck—it was past eleven—Mrs. Solomons had withdrawn half-an-hour before ; and Miss Palmer would have stayed longer still, I believe, had not Mr. Solomons gone below. There was no prudery in her, but her notions of propriety were English ; and one of those notions was, that there was no harm in remaining on deck with a young man so long as an old man sat near : though the old man might have been asleep, or as good as asleep, with his thoughts among his share of the ship's freight, or upon the bills that would have matured before his voyage was ended. But every nation must have its manners, and it is better to subject

our girls to a foolish than to a barbarous code of etiquette.

And yet it was annoying to hear Miss Palmer say, as she stood upon the companion-steps :

‘ I am afraid I shall find it very hot in the cabin. However, I don’t feel at all sleepy, so I shall open the window and get the air in that way, and watch the blue fires smouldering in the wake of the ship ; there is nothing prettier and nothing that fills the mind with stranger fancies.’

‘ As though she couldn’t remain on deck to keep me company,’ thought I. But it would not do to suggest it, and for three quarters of an hour I remained alone, thinking of her sweet figure sitting at the great stern window of her cabin, and wondering what form her musings took, and if I was as much in her thoughts as she was in mine.

Eight bells were struck — midnight : a hoarse voice bawled the hour down the fore-scuttle.

‘ Star-bowlines, ahoy ! out with you, my hearties !’

Presently a man came along the deck to relieve the wheel; he was followed by Parell.

‘Still very quiet, sir,’ said he, gaping around at the sea and taking an unpoetical squint at the stars. ‘The breeze holds though, and it’s a mercy to feel the air; for of all fok’sles as ever I slept in, I never knew the likes of this ship’s for heat and cock-roaches.’

‘You will keep her as she goes,’ said I, ‘and see that a bright look-out is kept. I heartily hope we may overhaul some British cruiser, or stumble upon some friendly ship. A crew composed of you and me and fifteen men is hardly numerous enough for a ship of this size to make a man sleep with an easy mind. However, there is nothing to be done but to shove the old waggon along as fast as she will sail, and to keep our weather-eye lifting as we go.’

Saying which, and ordering him to arouse me should a sail heave in sight or the weather change, I wished him good-night, and withdrew to my berth.

I went on tiptoe through the cabin, and listened a moment or so at Miss Palmer's door to ascertain if she was still up: all was silent, and I passed on. Roomy as my berth was, it was as hot as an oven. I threw open the window, and pulling off my shoes and coat, lay down in my bunk, leaving the candle alight in the lamp that was hooked to an eye in the bulkhead. My bunk faced the window, and I lay watching the dark sea swelling to the stars upon the horizon, and the dome of heaven that was covered with a glittering dust, amid which the larger stars floated in bland, yellow, clearly-defined shapes. The vessel heaved slightly upon the ink-black invisible swell, and now and again the rudder drowsily jarred or a beam under the floor creaked faintly, and occasionally I could hear the flap of the mainsail against the shrouds, while the refreshing bubbling of water under the counter was like the tumbling of a fountain or the sound of rain among leaves.

What was that?

A loud cry and a sudden rush of feet, and

then another shout and the splash as of a human body thrown overboard.

I was on my legs in an instant, my momentary impression being that we had been surprised by some enemy's boats, though another sense in me, so to speak, found this impossible, as, even supposing every man on deck to have been asleep, no boat could have approached the ship without my hearing her through the open window.

I threw open my cabin door and ran out. It was dark—to my eyes pitch-dark after the bright light in my own berth. I felt for the end of the table, and sculled along the edge of it as swiftly as the chairs in the road would permit me, and just as I reached the foot of the companion-ladder, the starlight above was blotted out by the interposition of a human body in the act of descending.

'Who's that?' I exclaimed in a loud whisper.

'Me—Parell! Is that you, Mr. Madison?'

'Yes, yes: what is the matter?'

'For God's sake, bear a hand and come on

deck, sir. The fok'sle lamp's been cap-sized, the oil set flaming, and the ship's on fire!

A man need not have been to sea to conceive the effect these words produced in me. Of all the perils which beset the sailor, fire is so incalculably the worst, that alongside of it the direst horror you can pick out of the maritime catalogue is mild as a benediction. The very word—'fire!'—curdled my blood. I drew a thick, half-suffocating breath, reached the deck with a bound, and rushed forward.

A dense volume of smoke was pouring out of the fore-scuttle, going up in a thick, black pillar, spangled here and there with sparks to half the height of the fore-mast, where the wind caught it and bent it into the shape of a bow, and, dark as the sea was, I could see this hideous coil pouring slowly along it.

All the men were on deck, some of them only in their shirts ; four or five of them were throwing buckets overboard, and hauling them up full, and dashing them down the scuttle ; others had rigged the head-pump ; others again, at their wits'-end, darted here and there,

hoarsely shouting out their notions of what should be done.

‘Silence!’ I roared. ‘Where’s the hose? get it along, and keep that head-pump going. Some of you get that lower stun’sail clear, and souse it overboard. Parell, give me a hand here,’

A spare flying-jib was lying on the fore-castle: I bent a line on to it, and flung it into the sea; it was dragged up along with the studding-sail, streaming wet, and bundled down the scuttle. Instantly a fearful, suffocating volume of smoke belched up in hideous convolutions, driving away the men as though a giant’s hand had pressed them back.

‘Keep that head-pump going, men!’ I shouted, ‘and form you into a line for the side-buckets. Have no fear—keep cool. If the worst comes to the worst we have good boats, and our number is small. Stand to your duty, my brave fellows! Ransom, come you along with me to the main-hatch.’

I rushed aft, followed by the boy, but instead of descending into the ’tween-decks, I

scampered to the gig that was slung to the stern davits, jumped into her, handed out the beaker to Ransom, and ordered him immediately to fill it with water and replace it in the bows of the boat. I then ran below to my berth unhooked the lamp, and flinging all thoughts of propriety to the wind at such a moment, threw open Miss Palmer's door.

She was standing by the side of her bunk, fully dressed—even to her hat : precisely as she had quitted the deck. Her eyes sparkled in the lamp-light as she turned them upon me, but no exclamation escaped her, and I knew by her demeanour that she was conscious of what had happened, and was waiting for me to come to her.

‘The ship has taken fire forward,’ said I. ‘Give me your hand—have no fear—it is fifty to one if we don't master the flames. Meanwhile my business is to place you in a safe place. Come!’

She ran to me ; I grasped her wrist and hurried her through the cabin. As I passed the Solomonses' door I flung it open.

‘Follow me on deck!’ I cried. ‘We are

in great danger ! Ho, there ! are you awake ?'

I flashed the lamp upon the cabin, and saw Mrs. Solomons sitting up in her bunk, and Solomons' head over the side of his cot.

'I cannot stay !' I shouted. 'If the men miss me they will think I have betrayed them, and abandon the ship. Follow me on deck, I say. The vessel is on fire.'

A loud shriek broke from the poor woman, and the old man threw himself out of his cot. Knowing they would follow me, I hurried Miss Palmer on deck, and ran with her to the gig.

'Jump into that boat,' I said to her, 'and we will lower you into the water. Ask no questions, and have no fear. Do as I say.'

'I *have* no fear,' she answered in a steady voice, and slightly raising her dress, she sprang on to the taffrail and seated herself in the boat.

I took a hurried glance forward ; the fire was gaining upon the men fast, forks of flame like flashes of lightning glanced upon the ponderous column of smoke, and lighted up

the half-naked figures toiling like demons round the mouth of the fiery cavern.

I got into the stern of the boat, and took a turn with the hauling end of the after-fall round a thwart.

‘Get your end of the fall round a belaying pin,’ I said to Ransom.

‘Ready, sir.’

‘Then lower away.’

The boat sank to the water. I unhooked both falls, and, making the painter fast round my waist, I clambered up the port-fall, gained the deck, and hitched the end of the painter to the starboard vang. The very slow way the ship had, enabled me to perform this job without risk ; and the whole business occupied very little more time than I have taken to write this account of it.

‘You are perfectly safe there, Miss Palmer,’ I shouted out, peering over the taffrail at her as she sat in the boat, that was now towing astern, and whose stem broke the water into threads.

‘I know I am safe,’ she replied. ‘Do not forget that there are others.’

‘I will see to them,’ I answered ; and rushed forward again to let the men know I had not deserted them—marvelling at the wonderful courage of this girl from whose lips not a sound had broken as the boat sank into the water, nor when she had seen me clamber on board again, and who still preserved her heroic fortitude as she sat in the deep shadow thrown upon the sea by the high stern of the ship, alone, with the black water within a few inches of her hand !

But her being where she was made my heart lighter. I had provided, at all events, for her safety—such as that provision was—against the terribly sudden and unexpected occurrences of a fire at sea, and, noticing that the Solomonses had not yet arrived on deck, I plunged among the men.

Hardly had I reached the fore-scuttle, when an immense body of flame soared up. The brilliance blasted the eyesight ; the heat was scorching ; the foresail caught, and spanged into a terrific blaze ; the men at the head-pump, fearing to be cut off by the fire, darted aft, and there was a rush into the waist.

From the moment my eye had caught sight of the smoke, on my arrival on deck, I had no hope that my slender crew would be able to save the vessel ; but I never could have imagined that the fire would have gained upon the ship so fast and furiously. Already she was in a blaze forward : a quantity of vapour was pouring out of the main-hatch, which we had not had time to close ; her fore-mast was in flames ; her canvas streamed in ruby-coloured trails ; the tar on the standing rigging burned swiftly and dropped in flaming lumps, which emitted a sooty smoke ; and yellow fire flickered along her fore-stays, and worked its way among the jibs down to the bowsprit and jib-boom ; and masses of smoke overhung the sea like a huge thunder-cloud.

The men stood in the waist paralysed. I saw their eyeballs rolling like red-hot cinders in the crimson radiance of the flames, which darted up and coiled around the fore-mast with the hoarse and rushing sound of a sweeping wind. Their shadows lay like bronze effigies upon the dusky yellow sheen

on the decks ; their faces gleamed like quick-silver in the overpowering light—and who could describe the anguish and dismay expressed in some of their postures as they turned towards the fire after their rush from the fore-castle, and stood—every one of them—motionless as images, as long as it would have taken a man to count twenty?

For the space of half a mile to leeward of the ship the heavens were hidden by the smoke, and the stars replaced by millions of fiery sparks, which sailed away in whole constellations, for, among the other things I took notice of in this awful time, was, that the smoke from the fore-hatch did not go up steadily, but was vomited out in black, fat masses, like a succession of discharges from a gun, and with every belch of jetty vapour there rushed forth myriads of sparks, whilst between the puffs the flames soared in a column, the circumference of whose base was the aperture through which the fire darted, but whose summit branched out like a palm-tree, slightly inclined over the ship's head by the light breeze.

I was in the act of shouting to the men to clear away the pinnacle and get it overboard, when the wind was knocked out of my body, and I was nearly thrown down by Mrs. Solomons flinging her whole weight upon me.

‘Oh, Mr. Madison!’ she shrieked, ‘for God Almighty’s sake tell us what to do! Make ’em put the boats over: it’ll be too late soon!’

And she recoiled from me with an ear-splitting yell, as the flames, reaching a large pivot-gun on the forecastle, exploded it with a violent concussion, whilst almost at the same instant the foretop-mast fell—a huge glowing beam—sweeping the blazing yards and rigging through the air in its descent over the bows, amid a roaring like the breaking of a heavy surf.

‘By God, she is right, Parell!’ I shouted. ‘Get the pinnacle over, man. The ship will be on fire from stem to stern in another five minutes. Take your wife’s hand,’ I exclaimed to Mr. Solomons, who stood looking up at the blazing rigging so phlegmatically, that

I believed he was dazed by the sudden calamity; 'and stand at this gangway whilst I haul the gig round. Keep your presence of mind, Mrs. Solomons; there are boats enough to save ten times our number.'

I ran aft to loose the gig's painter from the vang to which I had hitched it. Where was it? I rubbed my eyes furiously, and looked again: *the hitch had slipped, and the rope had gone away overboard.* The blazing heights of mast and sail sent the red glare broadcast over the sea, and to my horror and despair I beheld the gig, with Madeline Palmer standing up in it and waving her arms, floating a quarter of a mile astern.

The misery of a lifetime wrenched my heart at the sight: I am sure it drove me mad for the moment. I whipped out my knife, cut the laniards of a life-buoy that hung over the taffrail, slipped the thing under my arms, and threw myself overboard—a twenty feet fall. It was all sputter, giddiness, froth, and splashing; I was then on the surface with the life-buoy under my arm-pits, and

swimming with eager, feverish sweeping of my limbs towards the gig.

The cold water gave me back my mind, or at all events the capacity of understanding my actions. The life-buoy securely floated me, and I merely needed to move my hands and legs to propel myself towards the gig. My brain then became extraordinarily active ; no drug could have produced so great and violent a passage of thought, though without confusion : for I was perfectly cool ; I reasoned collectedly on the impression my jumping overboard would produce on the men, and assured myself that my action would immediately be justified to them when they saw that the boat was adrift with Madeline Palmer alone in her ; I also knew that they would launch the pinnace, that there was room in her for twice their number, and that I could have done no more for Mr. and Mrs. Solomons than I could trust that intelligent seaman, Parell, to do. And then I thought of the agony of mind the girl I was making for must have suffered when she found the boat stationary, and the flaming ship leaving her.

And then I wondered if there were any sharks in the neighbourhood!

At *this* thought the blood tingled in my system with the violence of the cramp, and, setting my teeth, I swam with all my might. The vision of Chestree's dead body in the midst of the foam lashed up by the bloody worrying of the sharks, rose with horrid vividness to my mind's eye, and a dreadful expectation tortured every nerve in my body from the top of my head down to the soles of my feet. O God! what agony was there in *this* thought! To this hour I marvel that I did not clamber out of the water into the gig a white-haired man. Do not call it cowardice, but rather consider the many surrounding horrors whose whole forces contributed to exasperate the poignant expectation that possessed me during my lonely swim: the sea was coloured like sulphur by the blazing ship down to many fathoms ahead of the boat, but beyond, it was stone black, and the short horizon I commanded with my head and shoulders above water, brought the stars down to the very surface of the ebony space,

and the mere unearthliness of the effect of the colour of the water in which I swam against the black sky and the stars which reeled upon the sea within the distance of a few strokes of an oar, might have unstrung the nerves of the most robust man living ; behind me I could hear the roaring of the flames, the crash of falling spars, the hissing of huge glowing fragments quenched by the sea as they plunged over the side, the occasional boom of ordnance as from time to time the loaded guns were exploded by the heat, and the permanent undertone of crackling and spitting wood, of huge timbers warping, of solid plates and bars and fastenings of iron torn out of their holdings by the blasting and withering hand of the fire-fiend, an uproar blended by distance into one dreadful sound that lurked among and ran through the explosions of the guns and the splintering of wood, as though it were the moaning of the ship herself in her agony.

These things my consciousness took note of, in spite of the pressing fear of having a shark in my wake, as I mowed through the

water with my hands and made the life-buoy splash up the foam as though I were in tow of a boat.

I had but a quarter of a mile to swim—perhaps less, for at that time I had no eye for the calculation of distance—and already, in the clear yellowish radiance shed by the burning ship, I could distinguish Miss Palmer's face, and see that she was watching me. I continued swimming with all my strength without once looking behind me until I reached the side of the gig, and then telling Miss Palmer to sit lest she should be thrown into the water by the swaying of the boat, I clambered over the gunwale, threw off the life-buoy and lay back, spent by my fierce exertions, and incapable of speech.

The moment I was in the boat, Miss Palmer knelt down, took my streaming hands in hers and held them without speaking, looking eagerly into my face which, as it was turned towards the ship, was distinctly visible to her. This was her manner of showing her sympathy and the gladness my presence gave her; but how am I to convey to you

the tenderness, the compassion of her posture ? I raised her hands to my lips, and then drew my own away to squeeze the salt out of my eyes and to open the collar of my shirt that was half strangling me. I drew a deep breath.

‘Are the others safe ?’ was the first question she asked me.

‘Yes,’ I replied, having no doubt of it ; ‘by this time they will have launched the pinnacle.’

I stood up in the boat to see if I could make out any signs of them. I was surprised to observe the distance the ship had travelled from the gig. She had paid off dead before the wind, and her helm being, as I might take it, amidships, she was steering as straight as an arrow ; the after-part of her from her main-hatch was free from fire, but forward she was a mass of flames, upon which the breeze acted as though they had been sails, and the pall of smoke that was swept forwards with her concealing the summits of the spikes and forks and lancings of the fire, she resembled a sheet of flame as square as her

foreyards and as high as her tops driving along the sea. A magnificent, an awful sight, though distance robbed it of something of its sublimity; the sea was blood-red under her, and a wide circumference of sky was illuminated by a ruddy glow that was almost as vivid as a flush of sunset, but rendered unspeakably impressive by the midnight gloom into which it paled away on either hand.

I thought, indeed I was sure, that I could see the pinnacle towing at the ship's quarter, and I pointed it out to Miss Palmer, saying that they ought to make haste to get into the boat and cast her adrift, as the ship might explode at any moment.

'If they allow themselves to be dragged much further, we shall lose sight of them,' she exclaimed.

'Yes, I am thinking of that too,' I answered. 'What is Parell about?' is he taking in some stores while time remains? Pray God he is!' I cried, remembering that there was nothing in the gig but the small cask of water. 'But, great heaven, let him be quick! should the

was but one oar in the boat ; and for the moment this discovery gave a new edge to the misery of our situation. ‘ But what does it matter ? ’ I thought. Had we a dozen oars what would they profit us ? Should the pinnacle miss us, our only chance will lie in a passing ship.

However, I held my peace on this point ; and we remained gazing at the burning ship, and watching the illuminated water astern of her for the black speck that would denote the liberation of the pinnacle from the side of the vessel.

The wind blew softly ; but my hot cheeks found no refreshment in it. From time to time a fit of terror, that no exertion of my will could repress, seized me when I turned my eyes from the scarlet glare ahead to the black water alongside, and noticed how close we lay to the surface of it. At other moments, I was sensible of an amazing lightness of my body ; and this feeling possessed me with a violent inclination to laugh out, the vanquishing of which caused me an agonising struggle.

‘Why, how strangely things come about!’ I exclaimed presently, in a voice so hoarse that like Fear in Collins’s ode, I started at the sound myself had made. ‘*Figurez-vous,*’ as Johnny Crapeau says, a gentlemen and a lady meeting in a ball-room—wax-candles sparkling over them—the polished floor reflecting their figures as clearly as a looking-glass—brilliantly-dressed people around—the flash of epaulets, diamonds, glass-clear scabbards dancing upon the eye with the diamond-like playing of the waters of Plymouth Sound when the high sun stands over them! Now drop the curtain upon the glittering scene. Hey, presto, pass!—as the conjurors say—the curtain rises again. Father of mercy, what is here? Two figures in a lonely boat: the outline of their faces’—I dropped my head on one side to peer at my companion—‘faintly touched up with the sulphur-coloured radiance of their ship, that blazes like a burning mountain on the midnight sea. Who are they? Why—did not the curtain fall upon them a moment ago? O my God! spare one of them—

spare one of them for the sake of her beautiful nature and her courageous heart !

I raised my hands to the stars like a ranting tragedian, and then covered my face with them.

Phew !—it was like touching my cheeks with heated iron.

‘How horribly hot these hands of mine are !’ I exclaimed, looking at them. ‘And hark to the croak in my voice. Am I going mad ? I would swear that there is a demon perched on each of my eyeballs, hammering my temples, here’—touching them—‘with a caulking mallet.’

‘Why not lie down, Mr. Madison ?’ she said, so calmly that I could clearly hear and feel the sympathy of the rich sweet tones. ‘You are exhausted and feverish. Take some rest, and I will keep watch. For my sake, lie down. If harm befalls you, what will become of me ?’

‘Harm shall not befall you, Madeline—why, what do I call you ? Oh, I *cannot* say Miss Palmer——’

‘Say Madeline.’

‘Madeline—what a tender name! Madeline—’ and I lingered over the word, repeating it several times. ‘What was I saying? Ah, you wished me to lie down. But not whilst that vessel lies flashing like a brand against the stars. No, let me see her vanish, Madeline, and then we will consider what is best to be done.’

I endeavoured to rise, but reeled like a drunken man, and dropped heavily upon the thwart again, with my hand upon her shoulder. Alas! alas! that I, who would have died for this girl, should, in the insanity of the fever that was eating into my brain, have refined the torments of her situation by my language and conduct! I was like a half-drugged man, inspired by some devil that made me say and do a hundred extravagant things, of the imbecility, ay, and even of the cruelty of which I was perfectly sensible though I could no more control my tongue and gestures than I could have extinguished the burning ship by blowing through my lips at her.

From time to time I would look from the

flaming vessel to Madeline, and by such feeble light as the distant glare and the stars threw upon her, I saw that her face, pale as marble, was as steady and tranquil as marble too. She let me take her hand and hold and even kiss it without even offering to withdraw it, and sometimes she would dip a silk handkerchief she had removed from her throat in the water alongside and press it to my burning forehead, and whenever she saw me rocking in my seat, she would pass her arm round my back to support me.

All this I noticed and tried in my delirious way to thank her for, but after a little while I found that speaking gave me pain, not because of the effort of it, but because my tongue seemed formed of molten lead, so heavy that the muscles of it had scarce power to move it, and so burning hot that every wag of it was like the red-hot end of a lighted cigar tossing in my mouth.

There was the half of a cocoa-nut shell lying in the bottom of the boat that had probably been used as a baler. Madeline's foot striking against it called her attention to it ; she picked

it up, and I gave a strange laugh as she examined it. It evidently put an idea into her head, for she rose and was moving forward. I clutched her dress.

‘Madeline,’ I cried, ‘don’t leave me! sit where you are! Where would you go?’

‘To get you some water,’ she answered.

‘Oh, that is what I want!’ I exclaimed in my thick voice. ‘Ay, get me some water, Madeline; it will cool my red-hot tongue, and I shall be able to talk to you. Yes, to be sure, water is what I want,’ and I mumbled this over and over until she came out of the bows of the boat with the shell full of water.

She held it to my lips, and I drank with terrible eagerness. Strange as it will seem to you, I did not know—or shall I say I did not feel?—the craving of thirst until the water was at my lips, and then the sense of thirst became a madness. Oh, the deliciousness of that draught! the blessed, though short-lived relief it yielded me!

‘It has made a man of me, Madeline!’ I exclaimed, covering her hand with kisses in

my delirious gratitude. 'Let God but give me strength and health to hold by you until you are rescued, and I shall be ready to die!'

I hid my face in my burning hands, and felt the boiling drops searing my face as they oozed like blood from my eyes.

'Julian,' she whispered, putting her lips to my ear and passing her hand round my neck, and pronouncing my name with exquisite tenderness: and I knew as well as though my pulse beat moderately and my head were cool and my brain clear that she called me by my Christian name for the greater sympathy it would express and for the happiness it would give me, speaking it out of her full tenderness and eagerness to soothe and comfort me.

I removed my hands from my face and looked at her.

'You are ill, Julian,' she whispered, 'but rest will make you well. Take that rest while you can. See how calm the water is, and how clear the sky! In such weather we are as safe in this little boat as we were in the

Namur. Don't let us forebode until real danger threatens us. To-morrow a ship may come and rescue us. God is our Father: His eye is upon us; my faith in His mercy was never greater than it is now.'

I grasped her hands, looking her steadily in the face.

'Madeline—dearest girl—this fever is killing my mind, and I shall die delirious. I love you, Madeline—kiss me before I lose consciousness.'

'You *shall* not die!' she cried, with an outburst of passion; then, controlling herself, she bent close to me, that I might see she smiled, and pressed her lips to my forehead.

'You will do now as I ask you—you will lie down.'

She took the light shawl from her shoulders and rolled it up to serve me as a pillow, and stood up: I rose too, but as I did so the ship, that had driven at least three and a half to four miles away from us, and rested upon the sea in what resembled a circular shape of fire—a huge red-hot globe—blew up. At that distance every glowing portion of the ill-fated

vessel looked but a mere spark, and the effect was much as though a ship-load of rockets had exploded. A large space of sky in the south-west was filled with brilliant spangles ; their radiance glanced with a pale yellow glare upon the air and the water like a flash of lightning ; then the whole was extinguished as though an impenetrable cloud had rolled between us and the flaming particles, and the crash of the explosion boomed past us along the smooth surface of the deep like a short peal of thunder.

I looked around me, and rubbed my burning eyes furiously, in the belief that I had lost the use of my sight. The heavens and the sea were black as pitch ; I could see no stars, no swelling gleam upon the water.

Well do I remember the fit of horror that seized me now.

‘ Madeline ! ’ I shrieked, ‘ we are alone—give me your hand—where are you ?—quick, your hand ! ’

I gasped for breath, and was suffocating : I felt her seize my arm, and recollect mutter-

ing, 'This is death !' and feeling my legs give under me as though they had shifted and dissolved like pillars of sand, and falling in a heap in the bottom of the boat, and that is all I remember.



CHAPTER VII.

H. M. S. 'SPEEDWELL.'



HEN consciousness dawned on me again, the scene had changed ; the night was past, the morning had come : but where was I ?

I tried to move my head, but I might as well have endeavoured to carry a sixty-four pound carronade on my back. As I had not the power to turn my head to *look*, I thought I would *touch*, and make discoveries with my fingers ; but here I was baulked again, for my arms lay by my side as dead as a pair of wooden legs. 'Good heaven!' thought I, 'what *is* the matter with me, and what has been done to me ?' That my consciousness must have been tolerably active, however, I

know by recollecting that I said to myself, 'Gulliver must have felt like this when he awoke from his first sleep in Lilliput.' I dwelt upon this comparison with a species of mild and foolish complacency, and then tried to make out the character of the place in which I lay. It might have very well passed for a coffin, and had it been dark when my senses returned, and I had been able to use my hands, no doubt I should have believed I was between the boards, and either buried or ready to lower away.

I looked steadily at the sort of decked-covering over me, which was all that I could see. 'This must be a bunk,' thought I, 'and—yes, I am on board a vessel. I feel the movement of her, and hear the straining of bulkheads. What vessel?' and I fell into a vile quandary. Lord! the pitiable puzzlement that afflicted me! 'Pooh, pooh!' I said to myself, 'do you ask *what* vessel, you fool? What vessel but the *Tigress* can this be, think you, poor simpleton?' Ay, to be sure—what vessel could I be aboard of but the *Tigress*? Nevertheless, I was not such an ass as I

thought. 'This is *not* the *Tigress* for all that,' said I, and I tried to shake my head; it would have been easier to make a turtle laugh by tickling its shell.

Presently I was sensible that some one was looking at me. I wanted to apologise for not being able to turn my head: some disjointed words rumbled in my throat, but no nervous bridegroom, returning thanks, ever made a more terrible mess of a speech.

'Hush, pray! do not attempt to speak: endeavour if you can to sleep,' said a male voice very gently, almost in a whisper.

Some breathless talk went on, and a door was closed. Almost immediately I either lost my reason again or fell into a profound sleep—which lasted, I was afterwards told, twenty hours—and when I awoke, I discovered, to my great delight, that I could move my head.

I was lying in a bunk in a small cabin lighted by a middling-sized port-hole, that was wide open, and through which a strong tide of warm sweet air was pouring. A cot swung near the door, and I noticed not only

the rude plainness of the interior, but the thickness of the bulkheads and the prodigious strength of the beams, and indeed of all the timbers and fittings my eyes rested upon. A large plain black chest stood in a corner, and after several attempts, I made out the white marks upon the lid of it to signify the initials 'J. G. P.' A military cloak, a military undress-jacket, and other wearing apparel were hung upon hooks against the bulkhead near the door, and a small pendant lamp was affixed to a stanchion in the centre of the cabin.

I lay dreamily watching these things as they swung with the roll of the vessel, languidly wondering where I was, but without, as yet, the faintest recollection of the experiences I had gone through before my senses quitted me.

I had been awake about ten minutes when the door was very stealthily opened; a precaution that rather amused me, considering that the straining sounds in the cabin were equal to the creaking of a hundred rusty hinges all worked at once; and a tall, handsome, sol-

dierly-looking man in a dark-blue braided tunic and white nankeen trousers entered very cautiously, stopping to peer at me, and holding on to the open door as he balanced himself to the movement of the ship.

On observing me to be lying with my eyes wide open, he carefully closed the door, advanced to the side of the bunk, and asked me in a very gentle voice how I felt.

'Very weak, but beyond that I hardly know,' I answered feebly, looking at him very earnestly, however, for something in his face—something in the expression of his eyes—fixed my attention, and I stared at him like one fascinated.

He was, as I have said, an extremely handsome man, his features high-bred, his forehead lofty, and his eyes dark and thoughtful ; but he had a worn and suffering look, his cheeks were hollow, his complexion an ashen-grey, and his fingers as emaciated as those of a consumptive person's.

'You have had a long sleep,' said he, 'and I was glad to find your repose so sound, for the surgeon informs me that sleep is the

great remedy in illnesses of this description. I will go and tell him you are awake.'

He was moving away.

'Pray, sir, forgive me,' I exclaimed. 'Your voice has broken a spell. I am recalling the past that was just now as blank as death. I had escaped with a young lady from a burning ship. Ah! I have it! I have been rescued—picked up, of course—and the lady? for God's sake tell me of her, sir?'

My eagerness to have his reply was so great that I succeeded in raising myself on my elbow, but I was too weak to maintain that posture, and fell back with a heavy sigh.

He looked at me doubtfully, as if debating whether he should answer my question; but I suppose the wistful expression in my eyes was too strong an appeal for him to resist, for he came back to my side, tenderly raised my hand in both his, and answered:

'The young lady is safe, Mr. Madison—safe, and, thank God, well; and I may inform you that she is on board this ship.'

'Pray stay, sir,' I exclaimed, thinking be-

cause he let fall my hand that he was going away. 'Your answering a few questions will really do me good. How long was the young lady in the boat?'

'You and she were rescued the morning after the *Namur* was burnt,' he replied, speaking as though reluctant to converse with me, and yet not liking to refuse.

'And I was ill through the night, I fear? Indeed I know now that I must have been *very* ill—insane, perhaps, with delirium! No doubt I was, and O my God! what sufferings must that noble girl have endured, alone—alone in a boat with a madman! She is well, do you say? That is welcome news to me. Had ill befallen her it would go desperately hard with me now, indeed it would, sir!' and I felt the hot tears swelling into my eyes, a melancholy proof of the weakness both of my mind and body.

He drew a chair to my side, being sagacious enough to perceive that his leaving my curiosity unsatisfied would do me more harm than talking.

'You will also be glad to hear,' he said,

'that the boat containing Mr. and Mrs. Solomons, and the crew of the *Namur*, was picked up by this ship. Indeed, we sighted her first, and it was owing to her report that our captain altered his course to seek for your boat.'

'So no lives are lost?'

'None; all are safe in this ship.'

'What ship is she, may I ask?'

'An English ship-rigged sloop of war—the *Speedwell*, homeward-bound from Kingston, Jamaica, with invalided soldiers.'

'From Kingston, Jamaica?' I muttered, looking from him to the initials on the black chest in the corner. 'May I inquire your name, sir?'

He gazed at me curiously; then a slight smile played over his worn features.

'My name is Colonel Palmer,' he answered.

'Yes—I might have thought so—she has your expression. This is a most wonderful meeting. How strange are heaven's ways!' and I lay looking at him so bewildered by the discovery that I thought I was falling crazy again.

'If *you* are surprised,' he said gently, 'you may conceive what *my* feelings were when on our coming up with the boat, I saw my daughter in her! It is an old story now, and I can talk of it calmly. You are aware that I had no idea she was coming out to join me, and even when I had her in my arms I could not credit the reality of our most astonishing, and, I may truly say, God-guided meeting.'

'You speak of it as an old story. How old might it be?'

'It will be ten days to-morrow since we picked up the *Namur's* boats.'

'And where have I been all this while?'

'Here, in my cabin, Mr. Madison, upon that bed in which you are now lying.'

'God preserve us!' said I.

I had thought we had been rescued that morning!

'Ten days!' I went on: 'Is it possible that I have been without my mind all that time? This is knowing what death is, sir, and what fools men are to let it frighten them!'

I closed my eyes, for my brain was beginning to simmer again : and shutting my eyelids seemed like clapping rolling-tackles on to my wits.

He rose from his chair, and said he must go tell the surgeon I was awake. I had a thousand more questions to ask him, but he would not stay. However, he had left me enough, in all conscience, to chew upon ; and bit by bit I got all the points together, until the whole story lay clear in my mind.

Astounded as I was by the coincidence of the meeting between Colonel Palmer and Madeline, I made a greater wonder of my long unconsciousness. It stirred the hair upon my head to consider that to all intents and purposes I had been *dead*—not even a ghost, but a corpse—for nine days. I tried to sit up to assure myself that my body was as much alive as my mind, but could not manage it, though the plunge I gave in the effort was tolerably reassuring.

About ten minutes after Colonel Palmer had left me, the door of the cabin was boisterously flung open, and in walked a short, thick-

set, bow-legged, and wall-eyed man ; his busy, bustling, bouncing movements, the hard blunt expression on his face, the square heavy hands with red knuckles and red finger-points—bah ! this sketching grows fantastic ; besides, if the man were no better he was no worse than the average of the leather-headed butchers—ill-paid, half-educated, and superlatively coarse-fibred—who operated on the wounded lieges in his Britannic Majesty's cock-pits in those times.

'Hallo !' he sung out : 'awake at last, my man, are you ? After such a spell of rest, by Jupiter, you should be able to keep late hours for the rest of your natural days !'

He broke into a loud laugh, that earned him an indignant scowl from the colonel who towered behind him.

'Well, how do you feel now ?'

I told him, and then he felt my pulse, and put his great hand, that felt like a warm beefsteak, on my forehead, and said to Colonel Palmer :

'He'll do, sir. He wants no physic—rest

and time are the only medicines for him. Are you hungry ?

‘Yes,’ said I, ‘I am hungry.’

He winked at the colonel, and broke into another guffaw.

‘Ah!’ said he, ‘we naval men pretty well know what a privateersman’s maw is. However, you must belay your professional instincts until you are stronger. Hearty eating won’t suit a stomach that’s been empty nearly a fortnight. The steward shall bring you a basin of broth presently.’

He was going, but the colonel stopped him and whispered a question.

‘Why, yes,’ answered the surgeon, loudly. ‘It’ll do him good, sir. He’s had his sleep, and promises well. But he ought to get shaved first.’

And with another noisy laugh he bounced out hurriedly, leaving a dull flavour of rum in the air, though, mercifully for me, it was quickly dispelled by the glorious rush of wind through the port-hole.

‘I hope you will not let that man’s manner vex you, Mr. Madison,’ said the colonel.

I smiled, and begged him to believe that low as my nerves were, they were strong enough to support the surgeon's voice, and even his face.

'I whispered to him to tell me,' he continued with a fatherly kindness in his manner of addressing me, 'whether there would be any indiscretion in my daughter's seeing you. He said—but of course you heard his answer. Madeline is anxious to thank you for your devoted conduct to her when the fire broke out in the *Namur*. She has watched by your side very constantly during your illness,' he added, with a smile, 'and it is reasonable enough that she should wish to be one of the first to congratulate you on the happy turn your malady has taken.'

There must have been a wonderful magic in the name of Madeline to stir the blood of a man so prostrated as I was; yet before the colonel had done speaking, I felt my face uncomfortably hot.

'It will be a happiness I should not have liked to ask for,' said I.

Without another word he left the cabin, and in a few minutes returned, and held open the door to let his daughter enter.

There was a little hesitation in her walk, but none in her manner when she took my hand. She may have rehearsed a speech, she may have schooled herself to meet me calmly ; but, our glance meeting, the greeting faded upon her lips, the tears gushed into her eyes—we looked at one another without speaking.

The colonel walked to the open port-hole and stood staring out of it with his back upon us.

She was the first to break the silence.

‘I have been waiting a long while for this,’ she whispered. ‘You have been insensible ever since that dreadful night.’

‘Yes, your father told me so ; but I am sensible enough now, thank God,’ said I, speaking feebly, but noting her well, and observing that she looked in good health, somewhat pale, indeed, and a trifle dark under the eyes, but cheerful, and gentle, and beautiful. ‘Next to my having been dead

dierly-looking man in a dark-blue braided tunic and white nankeen trousers entered very cautiously, stopping to peer at me, and holding on to the open door as he balanced himself to the movement of the ship.

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'Pray stay, sir,' I exclaimed, thinking be-

to my love-speech and her kiss. Out of my heart, like an owl out of a hole, flew the awakened memory with a clumsy flapping and a wild gyration.

'I remember calling you Madeline—I remember that and more. One precious word from you now—nay, why not *now*? I shall never be *saner*—and you alone can give me the happiness that makes strength and health. Whilst your hand is in mine, one precious word! Madeline, may I call you by that name?—and say again, as I said when we were alone on the wide midnight sea, and when I believed the hand of death upon me—*I love you!*'

Heavens! when I look back and think of myself lying black-bearded and sallow and gaunt in that bunk, and mouthing in anything but a melodious voice, God knows, the two-penny rant that passion will wag out of the most prosaic tongue, I can only wonder that she looked at me without laughing.

Instead, she drooped her sweet face over mine, and I saw a smile—not derisive, my

friend—trembling among the tears which sparkled upon the long lashes.

‘I wish to make you happy,’ said she.

A single word from me would have spoilt it.

The colonel looked around.

‘Maddy, my love, this first visit was to be a short one, you know.’

‘Not for my sake, Colonel Palmer,’ said I.

‘You can judge by my voice what it is doing for me.’

‘It is certainly clearer. Who’s there?’

The steward in a camlet jacket, and burlesquing Atlas by carrying his globe under his waistcoat instead of on his shoulders—in all my life I never beheld so orbicular a belly—his nose a fiery pimple, and his left cheek handsomely engraved with a broad scrofulous scar, rolled into the cabin, bearing a basin of broth and a jug of water, in which floated a small squadron of cut-up lemons.

Madeline took the tray from him, propped my head with a pillow, and fed me. No doubt by trying I might have made shift to feed myself; but it was pleasant to be fed

by Madeline; and had I been a street-artist, I could not have composed my arms in a more helpless attitude upon the coverlet.

'That will do you good, Mr. Madison,' said the colonel, watching the operation with great interest.

I dodged the spoon to say, 'I am overpowered by your daughter's goodness, sir.'

'She is equally obliged to you. Your first thought was for her when the fire broke out, Mr. Madison.'

'But nothing that I tried to do or could do,' said I, again dodging the spoon that had grown suddenly jerky and sloppy, 'could compensate her for the alarm and misery my delirium in the boat——'

But a dexterous pop of the spoon now closed my mouth.

A long night's rest greatly invigorated me: I slept from eight in the evening until nine in the morning, and when I awoke I sat up in my bunk, and cast my eyes around for

my clothes ; had I seen them I should have dressed myself.

My first visitor was the wall-eyed surgeon, who, after telling me I was very much better, prohibited me from rising, so I plumped my head into the pillow again, and lay quiet and full of thought for about half-an-hour, at the end of which time the steward entered with another dose of the broth I had swallowed on the previous day ; and he was no sooner gone than Madeline came in.

I looked, suspecting her father was behind her ; but she was alone.

There was a freshness and sweetness of complexion, manner, smile, in this girl that gave the same sort of pleasure to every sense in a man that the fragrance of a flower gives to the sense of smell. The brown, plain, sturdy, solid cabin in which I lay, took from her presence such a light and perfume as one could only imagine it receiving from the flash of sunshine upon white roses and gleaming lilies.

There are some women who waft a sweet and subtle odour through the air with every

wave of the hand, with every movement of the head, with every sweep of the dress. It is not a perfumer's fragrance; it was never contained in a bottle or a powder-box. Whether it is peculiar to certain types of beauty—most auburn-haired girls have it, I have found—whether it is a blessing bestowed by nature upon such of her creatures as delight her eyes; whether it is peculiar to certain complexions; whether it emanates from sweetness of disposition, or is purely a physical quality, I have never yet had the leisure to very carefully consider; perhaps the subject has been already treated. Any way, no girl that ever I met had this gift of fragrance in greater perfection than Madeline Palmer. As she leaned her face forward to wish me good-morning, it was like holding a bouquet to my nose.

'I have seen Mr. Cutler' (the surgeon), said she, 'and he says you are much better. But you are not to get up, and you will require nursing for some time longer.'

So saying, she put my broth before me.

'I shan't want to get up,' said I, working

at the broth, 'whilst you are within hail, Madeline. Does your father know that I am in love with you, dear?'

'Why, yes—he did not require to be told, but I did tell him,' says she quite simply.

'But how could he guess what *my* feelings were when I was without my senses, Madeline?' said I, stirring the broth to cool it.

'Why, Julian, are you sure that all your wits have returned to their home, that you ask me such a silly question? Didn't he see me nursing you, you foolish child? And *do* you suppose that I attended to you like a hired nurse so that no trace of what was in my heart was visible in my face?' and her rich contralto laugh rang like a fine melody through the cabin.

'Deuce take this broth! I have burnt my mouth. Hand me that lemon-water, like a darling. Well, do you know I *am* a fool to ask such a question. But what does he think of it all?'

'He is quite satisfied; besides,' said she, fixing her lustrous, honest eyes full on me, 'he knows I would accept only the love of a

man whom I could trust and be happy with, and when I told him I was silly enough to feel that it would make me unhappy to lose you—*why*, I'm sure I don't know' (a sigh), 'he kissed me, and no more was said.'

'Madeline,' said I, looking over my spoon at her—three spoons in a line!—'I never thought it would come to this. I never dreamt that I should have the luck to win you. I am dreadfully happy, my precious one! Who the deuce am I that such a glorious gift as you should come to me?'

'Eat your broth, and don't disparage yourself. I am tolerably well satisfied with you, so don't try to weaken my good impressions,' said she, with one of her sly glances.

'How are the Solomonses?'

'Quite well, and so are all the men. Parell has been very anxious about you, poor fellow, and begged leave to watch by your side; but I did not intend to give up my place. You will be sorry to hear, however, that the whole of the men have been impressed by the captain of this ship, and have become men-of-warsmen.'

' Parell too ?'

She nodded.

This did vex me very much ; so much so that I could hardly speak for some minutes. But there was no help for it, though I considered that impressment was a barbarous usage to give to shipwrecked men. She watched my face, and changed the subject by telling me that Mr. and Mrs. Solomons had been very kind in their inquiries after me ; but it had cost her several long arguments to convince them that I was not actuated by any indifference to the value of their lives because I jumped overboard when I saw the gig adrift. She added that Mr. Solomons was exceedingly mortified and disgusted to find himself carried back to England after the arduous and tragical experiences he had passed through in his effort to reach Jamaica ; and her description of the old man's rage with Captain Lomax (who commanded the sloop) when he, the captain, angrily refused to return to Kingston, made me laugh so heartily as to pretty well clear out of my mind the annoyance caused me by the impressment of my men.

She then spoke to me of her father, and, with much concern, of his health, that had at last compelled him to invalid himself and return to England ; and gave me the full particulars of their meeting, *her* amazement when he rushed forward to receive her on her being handed over the side of the sloop, and *his* blank bewilderment at finding her—of all places in the world—in a small open boat at sea, when he had not the least doubt but that she was with her aunt in his house near Canterbury.

She also described the night she had passed with me in the boat : how she had had one dreadful struggle with me to prevent me from throwing myself overboard ; how we had nearly upset the boat between us in the frantic wrestle ; and how nothing saved me—‘ for you had the strength of a giant, Julian,’ said she—but my tumbling backwards over a thwart and falling into the bottom of the boat ; and how she had taken the boat’s painter (of course she did not talk of ‘ painters ’ and ‘ thwarts,’ but I prefer to tell her story in my own tongue) and secured my arms and legs with it.

'May heaven bless you for your noble pluck! I cried, breaking into her story out of the fullness of my heart; 'and for your devotion to a man who has caused you so much misery.'

She silenced me by clapping her hand over my mouth, and proceeded to relate how she sat watching all through that terrible night, praying for strength and courage and for the help that came at last.

'I never knew what the horror of loneliness was before,' said she. 'It is past, and I can speak of it calmly; yet I know that my whole life will be haunted by the memory of that dark sea and the frightful solitude of it, and of your moans and cries as you lay bound, and the burning ship whose image was in my eyes turn them where I would, so that the spectre of it, as it were, was constantly before me, until the sun rose and showed me this ship, like a tiny cloud, a long, long way off.'

'It is past, as you say, Madeline; and having given us the love that we have exchanged, let the knowledge that it has left us happier than it found us make us think generously of that bitter time.'

I drew her towards me in a passion of love and gratitude—as who will not understand in me that will but consider how I had made this girl suffer; how beautiful had been her courage; how faithful the affection it had been my unexampled fortune to excite in her pure, gentle, and heroic heart?—and kissed her with my arm round her neck; and she had barely time to release herself, blushing and somewhat disconcerted by the ardency of my embrace, when her father walked in.

‘Now,’ thought I, ‘I’ll plump my thoughts into him at once. The sooner we clear up and coil down the better.’

He shook my hand with great cordiality, and expressed himself heartily rejoiced to observe the marked improvement in my appearance (‘Nothing like kissing to clear the complexion,’ said I to myself); and I glanced at Madeline, who immediately arose and left the cabin, mistaking the look I gave her, as she afterwards admitted, as a hint that I wished to speak to her father alone.

I immediately opened upon him.

‘Colonel Palmer,’ said I, ‘with your per-

mission, I should be glad to have a few words with you on the subject of your daughter.'

He smiled and, with much kindness in his voice, said :

' There is no occasion to approach the subject with formality, Madison. I find you and her attached to each other, and I am quite content that it should be so. You have been associated in a singular misfortune, and your devotion in making her the first object of your care, and hers in protecting you against your own violence in the boat, are fitly rewarded by your common affection. You will also see that her name, in consequence of the burning of the *Namur*, is particularly identified with yours—in such a way, indeed, that I will say your wish to make her your wife exactly accords with my desire.'

' I am very glad to hear that, colonel, and thank you for your candour. As I have some reason to believe Madeline was not indifferent to me before she and I went adrift in the gig, no excuse can be made for supposing that my good fortune in winning the dear girl is entirely due to our having been alone in an open boat.'

‘Certainly not,’ he answered earnestly, and yet amused by my plainness, too; ‘her happiness is my chief consideration. I know she is attached to you; still it is fit and even honourable that I should give you one of my reasons for readily acquiescing in her engagement to a gentleman who, down to yesterday morning, had never set eyes on me, and whose character I could only admire in Madeline’s stories about him.’

‘Well, we are not arrived in England yet, Colonel Palmer. I hope you’ll get to know me better before the old home is hove up.’

‘Why, I may say I know you very well already,’ he answered; ‘but, as you suggest, we have four or five weeks before us in which to improve our knowledge of each other.’

‘With regard,’ said I, wishing to heaven I was dressed—for lying in a ship’s bunk, habited I knew not in whose bedgown, my manly figure (the best part of me) concealed by the bedclothes, incapable of making a bow, and a little too weak to help out my words by the graces of my hands—I was, as you see, cruelly disadvantaged and made even

more insignificant in my own esteem than was fair to my gift of the gab, by the towering, well-bred, well-dressed, dignified colonel—
'with regard, colonel, to my position and prospects——'

'We will discuss these subjects another time,' said he.

'Still, I should like to say——'

'My dear friend, there is no occasion whatever to discuss your prospects and position with me now, or at any other time, though I give you full permission to talk about them with Madeline as long as you choose. For myself, I will take advantage of this chat, that must be cut short for your health's sake, to tell you that I am a widower, which however I believe you know, and that Madeline is my only child. I am afraid, indeed I am sure, my health will oblige me to quit the army, and as you would not have me companionless during the rest of my days, I will merely stipulate as a return for the gift of my child, that you and she live with me—that is, of course, if you abandon the sea, which I believe,' said he with a smile, 'she will insist

upon your doing. My house at Canterbury would be uninhabitable to me without Madeline, and as I cannot be a mother-in-law, Madison, you will have nothing to fear from my interference in your domestic affairs.'

'Your programme, my dear sir, is an overpoweringly liberal one; but such one-sided——'

He would not hear me.

'All that need be said at present has been said,' he exclaimed. 'We have several weeks before us to discuss any other points which may arise.'

I was so far recovered on the fifth day, dating from my restoration to consciousness, that the surgeon gave me leave to dress and take the air on deck for a couple of hours. As yet I had seen no other faces than Madeline's and her father's, and Cutler's, so that it was really like rising from the tomb to go upon the breezy brilliant deck of the sloop, and find myself among sailors again.

It was known among the officers that Madeline and I were betrothed—I knew after-

wards that the colonel had propagated the news—he was mighty sensitive on the subject of that open boat, and reported that his daughter and I were engaged before the *Namur* caught fire—and therefore nobody was surprised to find her busily preparing an arm-chair with cushions for my reception, in the shadow of the mizzen-mast, round which the cool wind blew refreshingly. Captain Lomax, a stiff-backed old fellow, greeted me with a pompous shake of the hand, and a gruff congratulation on my recovery, and I was very civilly received by the first lieutenant, a young and delicate-looking man, a thorough gentleman, between whom and myself there sprung up during the voyage a friendship that terminated only with his death a few years ago.

I had scarcely seated myself, and Madeline had got the pillow at the back of my head in a ship-shape posture, when Mr. and Mrs. Solomons came up to me. I know not from what part of the deck they emerged ; I had not noticed them when I arrived.

Mr. Solomons shook my hand rather

slowly, but his wife was somewhat demonstrative.

'Bless my heart!' cried she, 'I thought to find you skin and bone. To hear Miss Palmer talk, one would have sworn you had fallen into a mere skiliton. Well, and how are you, mister? You don't ask how I am after the fright of the fire and your leaving of us to swim to your lady, not caring, I dare say, if Mr. Solomons and me became cinders so long as the *sweets* was saved. But I bear no malice, sir, and now that it's all over, I'm not for saying you didn't show a proper feeling in jumping overboard after Miss Palmer. It's more than Jonas would have done for me.'

'I'm glad to see you pretty middling,' said Jonas. 'I can't pretend *I'm* the thing, whatever my looks may thay. Fancy my being taken back to England again, after being almost within sight of Jamaica, and suffering from pirates and fire! And my goods! I suppose you know I was only insured for two-thirds.'

'I am sorry to hear that,' said I; 'but

two-thirds are better than nothing, and you'd have got nothing had the Yankees walked off with the *Namur*.'

'There's Parell trying to catch your eye,' Julian,' whispered Madeline.

I looked, and saw the honest fellow upon the booms forward, figged out in man-of-warsman's rig. He grinned and touched his hat, and pointed significantly to his garb, and would probably have expressed his feelings in further dumb-show, had not the captain slewed round in his walk along the quarter-deck, whereupon Parell toppled off the booms and vanished.

Finding me indisposed to talk, Mr. Solomons left me after a further bewailment of his misfortune in being forced back to England, and was followed by his wife ; and with Madeline at my side, and her father within earshot behind us, reading a book, I lay back on my pillow, surveying with a sailor's delight, and with every sense in me exquisitely relishing the sunshine and the breeze, the beautiful spectacle of the British sloop's decks holystoned unto the very complexion

of snow, blackened at regular distances with the bronze-coloured shadows of the heavy guns, with the brass-work flashing out red beams as the vessel rolled with a stately movement over the long swell that under-ran the blue and frothing surface of the windy, sparkling sea; while the forecastle was coloured with the uniforms of groups of soldiers, and the heavy, wide-spread shrouds, soaring like bars of iron from the white line of the hammock-cloths, led the eye to the broad and swelling canvas, which floated like piles of vapour against the heavenly blue of the sky.

I turned my eyes from the soft white of the towering sails to Madeline. She was looking at me.

‘Already there is a little colour in your cheeks, Julian,’ said she. ‘Your heart is with ships, I fear—there is no room for me.’

‘My heart is full of you, Maddy. Don’t question *that* truth, even in play. If my eyes are brightened by the sight of this ship it is because she is showing by her pace that her

instincts are sound, and that *we* have her sympathy. Every minute of this sailing carries us nearer home ; and home means so much to me *now*, dearest, that this speeding vessel delights me with a significance no other ship ever yet yielded, and the very song of the foam as it rushes past has such a meaning in my ear as any man would think me moonstruck to find in it.'

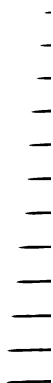
'I believe you, dear ; but don't ever let your poetical fancies make you forget or regret your promise to me that you will give up the sea for good as a profession when we are married.'

'Trust me,' said I.

And will any blue-jacket doubt that of all the promises a sailor could be warranted to keep, the promise of never going to sea again would be the very easiest ?

THE END.





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